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Addressing the Needs of Middle School English Learners Through Inclusion

In General Education Classrooms: A Case Study of a Midwestern

Metropolitan Public School District

by

Mary Krista Schneider

A DISSERTATION

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Major: Educational Administration

Under the Supervision of Professor Kent B. Mann

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Addressing the Needs of Middle School English Learners Through Inclusion
In General Education Classrooms: A Case Study of a
Midwestern Metropolitan Public School District

Advisor: Kent Mann

A significant shift in student demographics in United States public schools has summoned the attention and action of public school educators to address the needs of English learners (ELs) who are required to meet the same academic standards as their English-speaking peers. Across the nation, school administrators, teachers, and other education specialists face challenges in fully meeting the academic demands of ELs, especially when including the students in general education classrooms.

The purpose of this qualitative descriptive case study was to examine the implementation of inclusive practices, or specific instructional and academic supports that teachers provide to ELs, in middle school, core-subject-area classes at a Midwestern metropolitan public school district. Part of the qualitative research design included data collected from 20 interviews of school principals, core-subject-area teachers, instructional coaches, and other educational specialists, in order to share their perspectives and current reality regarding inclusive practice supports for ELs. Twelve observations of Professional Learning Community (PLC) sessions also contributed data on teacher collaboration to better serve ELs in core classrooms.

When analyzing the interview and observation data, four major findings were identified that align with the purpose of the study, research questions, conceptual framework, and the literature review. The findings include an understanding that all ELs have varied backgrounds, experiences, and skills; that there are specific instructional

implications which teachers must be aware of and apply in their teaching practices; the need for explicit professional development to be provided to educators regarding ELs and how they best learn; and that purposeful collaboration efforts among educators is crucial to student success.

The study found that all participants agree to a shared responsibility for students, and to improve the education of ELs, it is imperative for educators to refine their personal knowledge, understanding, commitment, and other elements of working with students to the best of their abilities. It was concluded that if all these conditions are addressed and implemented to a high degree, ELs will be successful at school and meet the same academic standards as their English-speaking peers.

This dissertation study was completed in tandem with another researcher colleague and doctoral candidate who was focused on high school educators (grades nine through 12) at the same study site, which allows for the potential to further define inclusion for ELs and to offer clarity regarding implementation of inclusive practice strategies provided by secondary general-education teachers.

Acknowledgements

“Sometimes, the strength within you is not a big fiery flame for all to see, it’s just a tiny spark that whispers softly ... you got this, keep going.”

(Author Unknown)

My dissertation journey has been one of hard work, commitment, and sacrifice.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

“English Learners are attempting to catch up to a moving target; whereas native speakers of English are not standing still waiting for them to catch up.”
— (Dr. Jim Cummins, Sheltered Instruction Observation Protocol National Conference, Seattle, Washington, July, 2018)

It is an exciting, yet challenging, time in today’s landscape of kindergarten-through-12th-grade public education. In a politically fueled and high-stakes era that addresses the social and academic needs of every student, lies an unprecedented set of challenges for schools across the United States. No matter where it is taking place, the rhetoric regarding student achievement and school accountability has never been more prevalent among educational circles. There is a well-publicized call for school systems to perform well, students to be fully prepared to meet college and/or career-ready standards, and that every high school graduate meet the increasing demands of our society. It is imperative that those in the education field gain an extensive knowledge of current educational issues, and find solutions to the barriers and challenges that our students face.

The specific challenges brought forward in this research study focus on the rapid demographic shift as schools enroll students who have limited proficiencies in the English language. Student demographic data reported by the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) states that “the percentage of public school students in the United States who were English Learners (ELs) was higher in fall 2015 (9.5 percent, or 4.8 million students) than in fall 2000 (8.1 percent, or 3.8 million students)” (NCES, n.d., para. 1). According to Lhamon and Gupta (2015), students identified as ELs are enrolled in 75 percent of public schools in the U.S., with no indication of decline (para. 2). Further, Spellings (2005) predicts that by 2025, one out of every four students will come

to schools from a non-English speaking home (as cited in Coleman & Goldenberg, 2009, p. 11) and Thomas and Collier (1997) claim that by 2030, approximately 40 percent of all public school students in the U.S. will be language minority students. “More importantly, though, the growth over the last 10 years has occurred in states that have not traditionally served large populations of English Language Learners (ELLs), mostly across the Midwest and southern states” (Verplaetse & Migliacci, 2008, p. 4).

In looking closer at U.S. Midwest public school districts, the Nebraska Department of Education (NDE), reports the number of ELs in pre-kindergarten through the 12th grade has consistently increased during the course of five years (as reported by public school districts to NDE between academic years 2013-14 and 2017-18). As indicated on the Nebraska Education Profile (NEP), the online NDE website for annual education data, nearly 7 percent of Nebraska’s public school students are ELs (2017-18), as compared to 6.04 percent in the 2013-14 school year. Seven percent of ELs in Nebraska is equivalent to approximately 22,600 students, each of whom are at various stages of learning English.

Background

The Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 (ESEA), now amended by the Every Student Succeeds Act of 2015 (ESSA), explicitly defines an EL as one who:

- (A) is aged three through 21;
- (B) is enrolled or preparing to enroll in an elementary school or secondary school;
- (C) (i) is not born in the United States or whose native language is a language other than English;
 - (ii) (I) is a Native American or Alaska Native, or a native resident of the outlying areas; and
 - (II) comes from an environment in which a language other than English has had a significant impact on the individual's level of English

- language proficiency; or
- (iii) is migratory, whose native language is one other than English, and who comes from an environment in which a language other than English is dominant; and

(D) whose difficulties in speaking, reading, writing, or understanding the English language may be sufficient to deny the individual (i) the ability to meet the challenging state academic standards; (ii) the ability to successfully achieve in classrooms in which the language of instruction is English; or (iii) the opportunity to participate fully in society. (ESEA, 1965, Section 8101(20), p. 393)

The Center for Public Education (n.d.) describes the growth in numbers of ELs and the diversity of cultures and languages that are represented. Several possible reasons for the influx of young immigrants include: political refuge from an oppressive government, access to work and educational opportunity, a relocation to be with family already living in the U.S., and the general desire for a better life. The Center for Public Education (2012) states that “compared with the last century, we are increasingly aging and white on the one hand, and young and multihued on the other” (as cited in Fong, Dettlaff, James, & Rodriguez, 2014, p. 270).

Edstam, Walker, and Stone (2007) address the significant numbers of ELs arriving in typically homogeneous towns that “can often send its residents reeling, with culture shock felt by both sides” (p. 4). As change continues to take place for many communities, it can be understood that school districts face a multitude of challenges to adequately serve EL students, especially those that have not served them before. A lack of funds and resources, teaching staff, professional learning opportunities, or an insufficient knowledge of second-language acquisition and the implications for teaching and learning, can create barriers for school districts to address these challenges.

Ultimately, as students enter schools with differing levels of English proficiency, it is necessary for all educators to consider ELs, their individual needs, and design education

plans for their success.

Curran & Petersen (2017) present the research of Denise K. Shares of the University of Northern Iowa in her dissertation titled, “Becoming a Culturally Competent Educational Leader” where Shares describes the changing demographics of American classrooms and the corresponding achievement and opportunity gaps that these changes can present to ELs. Shares also contends that “educational leaders must be prepared to help teachers work with children and families from diverse backgrounds to achieve high standards of excellence” (p. 56).

School staff are challenged to ensure the high performance of all students, but meeting the needs of ELs has proven to be complex work. What is known is that, on average, ELs’ academic achievement tends to be lower than their native English-speaking peers. Further, academic achievement gaps are understood because ELs are limited in their English proficiency (Echevarria, Vogt, & Short, 2013). Goldenberg (2008) agrees that this gap can exist because of limited English proficiency, but also because of lagging content knowledge, other social, emotional, and educational issues, or some combination of all factors.

It should be no surprise that ELs can be faced with formidable challenges, both in and out of school. Because middle school EL students typically range from ages 10 to 15, they may have some adult responsibilities in their family structure (e.g., translating for appointments, providing care for younger siblings, or working at jobs to assist the family). Further, if ELs are new to the U.S., they are also navigating a new country, culture, community, school, and language — all issues that are not uncommon and, most times, not their fault.

In the classroom, ELs can have difficulty acquiring access to the core curriculum and catching up to their English-speaking peers. Middle school ELs have a limited amount of time before graduating from high school, and in some cases, are labeled Students with Limited and/or Interrupted Formal Education (SLIFE). Lacking some, or all, prior education experience can dramatically complicate their progress in school. Many SLIFE arrive in schools with low, or no, English literacy skills or in their own native language, and are far behind in their knowledge of subject-area matter, which only compounds their education issues. SLIFE require even further specialized instruction above what is even normally considered for ELs (Custodio & O'Loughlin, 2017). For example, if a SLIFE enters the seventh grade in the U.S. and has missed several years of prior schooling (or has never been enrolled in a school), it poses immense hurdles for the student and his teachers. SLIFE face substantial challenges and are beyond the scope of this study.

Shifting the discussion surrounding the many challenges that ELs may face in our education system is understanding the knowledge, skills, and assets that each possess. The “funds of knowledge” concept was originally applied by Velez-Ibanez and Greenberg (1992) to describe “the historical accumulation of abilities, bodies of knowledge, assets, and cultural ways of interacting that were evident in U.S.-Mexican households in Tucson, Arizona” (Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction, 2016, para. 1). The life experiences, languages, cultures and beliefs, and other strengths that ELs bring to schools and communities, provide rich examples of how to recognize these funds of knowledge and to intentionally utilize them to make “strategic connections” in a school setting. However, these funds are not necessarily drawn upon or used as a resource

to enhance students' academic progress (Moll, Amanti, Neff, & Gonzales, 1992).

The increase in EL student numbers, varied languages spoken, and educational backgrounds potentially present considerable barriers to student learning as well as instructional implications for educators. This has compelled schools across Nebraska to examine how they appropriately teach and deliver services to the new population of students. It is clear to education leaders and other school personnel that they may not be fully knowledgeable (or prepared) to adequately meet the needs of ELs, morally, educationally, and legally.

Problem Statement

The problem being addressed in this study is to determine if middle school general education teachers have the knowledge, skills, and systemic supports to implement inclusive practices and address the academic needs of ELs. ELs are one subgroup of the student population who may be vulnerable to academic failure in core academic subject areas due to limited language proficiency and potential gaps in their formal education.

This study has the potential to reveal potential practices that can be shared with other school districts facing similar concerns. For the purpose of this research, inclusive practices for ELs are generally defined as specific instructional practices and academic supports that teachers are providing to ELs in middle school general core-subject-area classes (English language arts [ELA], mathematics, science, and social studies) for them to succeed as learners and achieve the same performance outcomes expected of all students. Middle schools in the study are defined as a sixth- through the eighth-grade campus configuration.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this descriptive case study was to examine the implementation of inclusive practices as part of the Language Instruction Educational Program (LIEP) for ELs in middle schools at a selected Midwestern metropolitan public school district. Understanding the current reality of inclusive practice implementation for supporting the academic achievement for ELs and telling the practitioners' story was key to the research.

Conceptual Framework

According to Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña (2014), the purpose of a conceptual framework is to explain the "key factors, variables, or constructs, and the presumed interrelationships among them" (p. 20). The conceptual framework will also influence the decision-making processes of the investigator, and will set the stage for meeting the objectives of the research. The framework that was considered for this study is based partially on the work of Diane Staehr Fenner (2014) in consideration of factors that can improve the likelihood of academic success for ELs, which is an overarching goal of this study.

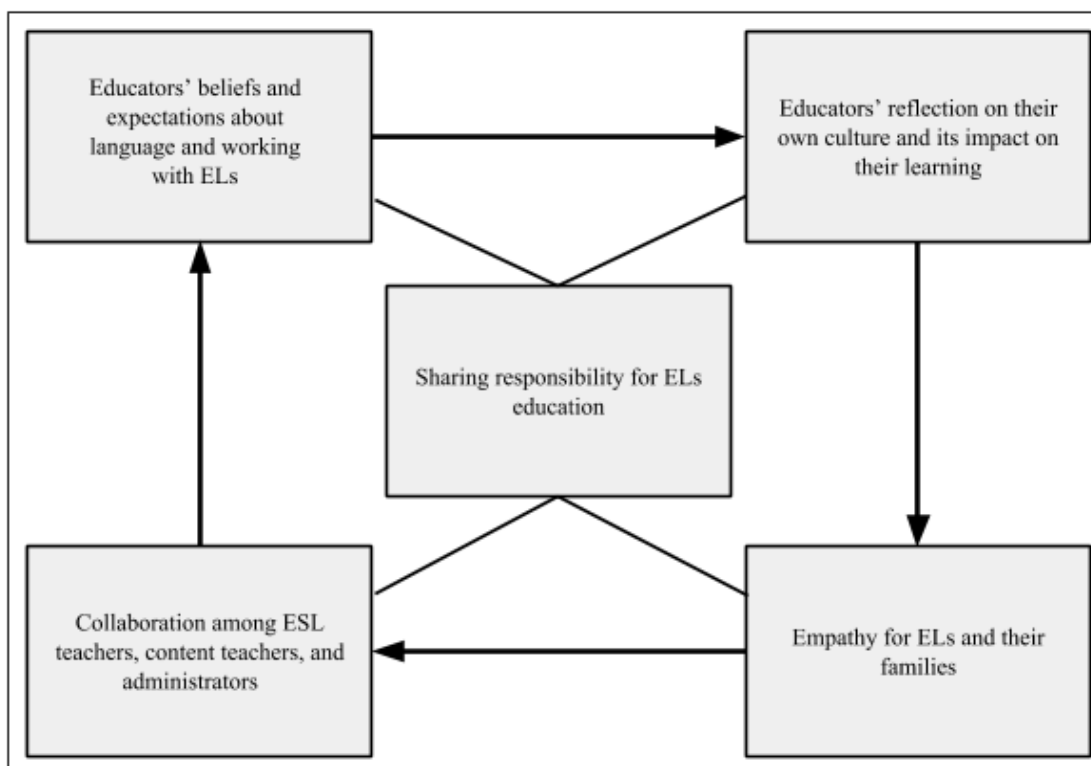
Fenner (2014) notes that "educators can move through a process to more actively share responsibility for providing an equitable education for ELs" (pp. 29-30). Factors such as the educators' beliefs and expectations of EL students; the assessment of an educators' own cultural beliefs and how those beliefs impact their teaching; genuine empathy for individual ELs and their family situations; and collaboration with other staff members, can either positively or negatively affect the outcomes for an EL's education.

When discussing middle school EL students who may have been served by a teacher credentialed in ESL (English as a Second Language), there is a need to focus the

conversation on the students' eventual transition into the general education setting and how that transition may affect his learning. Many times, ELs that have been directly served by an ESL-endorsed teacher or specialist, struggle to transition into content coursework with the noticeable decrease in specialized English language development instructional strategies. It is also noted that the shared responsibility and accountability of educators should be a vital component when determining the best educational program for EL students. Figure 1 is a graphic representation of the theoretical framework proposed by Fenner.

Figure 1

Factors That Influence Shared Responsibility (Fenner, 2014)



Utilizing Fenner's conceptual model as a foundation, this study addressed similar matters for examination when identifying the needs for middle school ELs in general education and how the teachers may respond. These considerations addressed the needs of the teachers, principals, and other staff members, when specifically making the attempt to understand the learning of the ELs themselves.

Teachers face wide degrees of academic abilities with their students, and those who are scattered along the English language proficiency (ELP) continuum add even more challenge to their instructional considerations (Curran & Petersen, 2017). The intent of this study was to describe how educational leaders and teachers address the needs of middle school ELs in a Midwestern metropolitan school district, to understand their

concerns, and to outline themes that can begin to be addressed.

ELs need time and focused instruction in order to successfully meet the demands of state content standards. Cummins (2000) suggests that it can potentially take seven to 10 years for ELs to learn English to a level high enough to perform on par with their English-speaking peers in academic proficiencies (as cited in Ziegenfuss, Odhiambo, & Keyes, 2014). Therefore, ELs cannot wait until they are fluent in English to acquire grade-level content. Rather, they must learn to develop their reading and math skills as well as their knowledge of social studies and science, all while learning English.

Further, to begin to truly address the needs of ELs, research and evidence-based programming models must be considered when identifying and implementing the best methods to teach ELs while also preserving and enhancing their own native language literacy skills. Additional factors to be analyzed are the variety of EL program service delivery models that have been designed and promoted by the U.S. Department of Education, state education departments, educational research laboratories, and EL experts.

Statement of the Research Question

The following research question has been identified with respect to the focus of this study:

Primary Research Question

How is a Midwestern public school district implementing inclusive practices as part of its Language Instruction Educational Program (LIEP) to address the needs of middle school English Learners?

Secondary Research Questions

1. What is inclusion for ELs in the core academic subjects in the middle school (e.g., English language arts, mathematics, science, and social studies)?
2. What are the beliefs and attitudes of middle school educators and administrators about ELs and their inclusion in general education classrooms?
3. What strategies do general education teachers use to support and include ELs in middle school classrooms?
4. How are general education teachers in middle schools supported through collaboration and professional learning to meet the needs of ELs?
5. How do educators and administrators perceive the implementation of inclusive practices for ELs in middle schools?

Study Design Overview

For readers to situate themselves in this case and to understand its key features, a qualitative descriptive case study research design was chosen. Creswell (2014) and Merriam (2009) describe how qualitative research helps to explore the meaning of people's lives, how they interpret experiences, and how the researcher understands phenomena and makes meaning of the data. Van Maanen states that "qualitative research is an umbrella term covering an array of interpretive techniques which seek to describe, decode, translate, and otherwise come to terms with the meaning, not the frequency, of certain more or less naturally occurring phenomena in the social world" (as cited in Merriam, 2009, p. 13).

Creswell (2013) describes case study research and the aspect that it focuses on contemporary and real-life circumstances, and descriptive case studies are among the

most common. The case study approach was chosen for this study in an attempt to develop an understanding of how a Midwestern public school district is currently implementing inclusive practices at the middle school as part of the process to address the academic needs of ELs.

The researcher's intent of this study was to promote an understanding of inclusive practices utilized in the middle school by providing “thick descriptions” of the data that either confirm what is already known or help the reader discover new meaning based on their own experiences and understanding (Geertz, 1973, as cited in Stake, 1995, p. 42). Suter (2012) states “to understand a complex phenomenon, you must consider the multiple ‘realities’ experienced by the participants themselves — the ‘insider’ perspectives and that natural environments are favored for discovering how participants construct their own meaning of events or situations” (p. 344).

Definition of Terms

Academic Achievement Gap — The educational term used primarily in K-12 environments that describes a disparity in academic performance between various subgroups of students (e.g., English Learners, special education, race, ethnicity, gender).

EL (English Learner) — EL is a term typically is used in K-12 education and refers to students whose native language is a language other than English, but is actively enrolled in learning English. This term is losing its popularity in research as it indicates a deficit-based ideology and that multiple languages are not only a resource, but that it is inequitable to discount home languages and cultural understandings of students (García, Kleifgen, & Falchi, 2008, p. 6).

ELA (English Language Arts) — ELA is a common term used in K-12 school

systems describing the instruction of interconnected skills of reading, writing (composition), speaking, listening, and viewing.

ELL (English Language Learner) — ELL is a term typically used in K-12 education and refers to students whose native language is a language other than English, but is actively enrolled in learning English. ELL is used interchangeably with EL (U.S. Department of Education, n.d.).

ELP (English Language Proficiency) — A student’s ability to utilize the English language to make meaning in reading, writing, speaking, and listening contexts. Levels of English language proficiency are one of the requirements used by school districts to formally exit an EL student from specialized EL services (NDE Rule 15).

Emergent Bi/Multilinguals — Emerging bi/multilinguals are those individuals who are at the early stages of bilingual development and in the “continual process of learning language” (García, Klefgen, & Falchi, 2008). In the area of K-12 education, and for the purpose of this study, this includes students who are officially designated by schools and school districts as English Learners. The term highlights that the home languages of students as an asset and a resource to learning rather than a deficit or hindrance to their education and access to academic content (García, Johnson, Selzer, & Valdes, 2017).

ESEA (Elementary and Secondary Education Act) — The federal law first enacted in 1965 as the main law of the federal government affecting K-12 education. It was signed into law by President Lyndon Johnson as part of the “War on Poverty,” providing funding to school districts to educate disadvantaged students. ESEA emphasized equal access to education and established high standards and accountability

for education entities (U.S. Department of Education, n.d.).

ESL (English as a Second Language) — ESL is a common abbreviation in school systems that describes programs of learning English where English is the dominant language. Sometimes, it is also used for describing the student themselves. It is also used in higher education institutions to describe a specialized endorsement for teachers who work with ELs (U.S. Department of Education, n.d.).

ESSA (Every Student Succeeds Act) — ESSA is the most recent reauthorization of ESEA signed into law by President Obama in 2015. ESSA pares back the role of the federal government in K-12 education and gives the states more leeway in making decisions for their schools and students. States are required to address accountability systems and adopt challenging academic standards (ESSA 20 U.S.C. § 6301, 2015).

General Education — General education can be considered an educational environment that typically developing children should receive. General education is not considered a remedial or specialized classroom and utilizes the general core-subject-area curriculum that is taught by a certified teacher or one that is endorsed in a specific subject area (e.g., ELA, mathematics, science, or social studies).

Inclusion — Inclusion describes the education of students in a general education setting regardless of a disability. The students have the right to be in this least-restrictive environment but are assured appropriate services and supports for them to be successful (Casale-Giannola & Green, 2012).

Inclusive Practices for ELs — For the purpose of this study, inclusive practices for ELs is generally defined as specific instructional practices and academic supports in the core academic subjects, including ELA, mathematics, science, and social studies for

ELs to succeed as learners and achieve the same performance outcomes expected of all students.

LIEP (Language Instruction Educational Program) — A LIEP is a type of instructional program planned to assist English learner students in the development and attainment of their English proficiency while also meeting state academic standards (NDE, Rule 15).

NCLB (No Child Left Behind) — NCLB was reauthorized legislation of ESEA. NCLB was signed into law by President George W. Bush in 2002, with the intent of holding schools accountable for the success of every student. The federal government had a significant role in holding schools accountable for student outcomes. The intent was to focus on certain populations of students (e.g., special education, ELs, and students in poverty) and to ensure high academic performance (U.S. Department of Education, n.d.).

Nebraska Department of Education (NDE) Rule 15 — “Regulations and Procedures for the Education of Students with Limited English Proficiency in Public Schools”, was created by PK-16 educators across Nebraska and is used to offer some common guidance for Nebraska public schools when enrolling English Learners into their districts. The guidelines are a combination of compliance-based procedures and guidelines that school districts can follow to help ensure they are appropriately meeting the educational needs of English Learners (NDE Rule 15, 2018).

PLC (Professional Learning Community) — A community of professionals who are dedicated to collaboration to achieve better academic results for their students. “PLCs operate under the assumption that the key to improved learning for students is continuous, job-embedded learning for educators” (Solution Tree, para. 5).

SLIFE (Students with Limited and/or Interrupted Formal Education) — SLIFE students are a subgroup of ELs who have experienced gaps in their education typically in their home countries and can be well below grade level in academic content. This interruption in education can be due factors such as: civil unrest, civil war, frequent migration, or other factors (Custodio & O’Loughlin, 2017).

Translanguaging — Translanguaging is the integration and the use of different languages together. As emergent bi/multilingual individuals read, write, learn, and communicate, they draw on diverse linguistic knowledge and resources to fluidly and creatively participate in learning (Otheguy, García, & Reid, 2015; García, Johnson, Selzer, & Valdes, 2017; Ascenzi-Moreno, 2018). Translanguaging is about communication, not about language itself. There are times when teachers need to be language teachers, focusing on accuracy in English so that learners can pass exams and be taken as proficient speakers in wider society. Much of the time, though, teachers are working with students to explore concepts, add to their knowledge, make connections between ideas, and to help them make their voices heard by others. This is often about communicating, and this is where using all of one’s language resources can be very valuable.

Assumptions

If ELs are included in general subject-area classrooms and educators demonstrate an asset-based ideology regarding ELs, use evidence-based EL instructional strategies, and collaborate with colleagues to plan instruction, then schools may meet the needs of ELs in the general education classroom through inclusive practices.

Delimitations and Limitations

It is recognized that the inclusion of ELs in general education classrooms is a

topic for students in all grades (K-12) and across many types of school districts. The delimitation of the study was narrowed to an intradistrict focus on three middle schools in one Midwestern metropolitan public school district. The researcher ensured the saturation of data through 20 interviews of administrators and teachers, and 12 observations of PLC sessions to gather data on teacher collaboration to better serve ELs in core-subject-area classrooms.

At the middle school level, most ELs participate in all core and exploratory courses, but with limited time, this study only took into account general education teachers in four core areas: ELA, mathematics, science, and social studies. Inclusive practices in a student's exploratory course schedule such as music, physical education, computer technology, and others could certainly be added to this study to deepen the understanding of inclusion of ELs in all coursework.

Additionally, as the Director of Federal Programs, the researcher assists in planning and monitoring the implementation of the district's EL programming, but does not have supervisory responsibilities over any of the participants. The researcher conducted the interviews and observations, which had the potential to limit the participants' responses because of the researcher's position, knowledge, and connection to the district EL program.

Significance of the Study

“Promoting the Educational Success of Children and Youth Learning English” states that “despite their linguistic, cognitive, and social potential, many ELs — who account for more than 9 percent of enrollment in grades K-12 in U.S. schools — are struggling to meet the requirements for academic success, and their prospects for success

in postsecondary education and in the workforce are jeopardized as a result” (National Academies of Sciences, Engineering and Medicine, 2017, para. 1).

National Education Association President Lily Eskelsen Garcia noted that “all educators must become fighters for what they and their students need to be successful” (n.d.). As ELs represent the fastest-growing student group, school systems are charged to offer equal access and opportunity and to address their educational needs. Not every district in Nebraska has a significant population of ELs enrolled in their schools, but as the demographics continue to shift, more educators are recognizing the need to focus on their teaching and learning practices to meet ELs’ academic needs.

This research was conducted because educators have a moral and professional responsibility to guarantee that EL students can participate meaningfully and equally in educational programs and other opportunities at school. When examining a real-world case, teachers, specialists and campus administrators can “reflect on their own beliefs and practices and engage in frank conversations about how we can work and learn from one another better in the service of ELs” (Castellon, Cheuk, Greene, Mercado-Garcia, Santos, Skarin, & Zerkel, 2015, p. 5). There are components of the study that can potentially help to describe the complexity of inclusive practices at the middle school level and assist educators when developing or revising their current instructional programs specifically for ELs.

This dissertation study was completed in tandem by another researcher colleague and doctoral candidate at the University of Nebraska focused on high school educators (grades nine through 12) in the same Midwestern metropolitan public school district. This

research focused on middle school (grades six through eight) with a potential impact as follows:

1. To identify gaps or discontinuity that is required of public school educators in meeting each EL at their point of need through effective instructional expertise.
2. To identify themes that support EL's and their transition from middle school to high school, and
3. To inform the prospective alignment of school district EL services (grades six through 12) at the secondary level.

Because this research is being carried out in tandem at the middle and high school levels, it has the potential to further define inclusion for ELs and provide clarity regarding implementation of inclusive practice strategies provided by general education teachers. The study can also impact future professional learning needs for educators and administrators in teaching ELs, establish criteria to ensure ELs' needs are being addressed through inclusive supports in general-content-area classrooms, and identify a set of common guidelines for the implementation of inclusion for ELs at the middle and high school levels.

Chapter 2

Review of Literature

U.S. schools continue to witness the influence of several pieces of legislation and how they impact ELs regarding educational equity, access, and program design to address the students' specific learning needs. Every EL has comprehensive and unique social and academic needs when acquiring the English language, and each is expected to master subject-area curriculum content. A well-documented increase in numbers of EL students entering U.S. school systems creates the urgency to understand and ensure their educational plan is appropriate.

Context

The U.S. Department of Education, Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Equal Educational Opportunities Act (EEOA) of 1974, state that “public schools are required to ensure that EL students can participate meaningfully and equally in educational programs” (Department of Justice and U.S. Department of Education, 2015). The professional organization TESOL International (Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages) reminds us that EEOA prohibits any deliberate segregation on the basis of race, color, national origin, (including language minority students), and ensures that schools nationwide provide equal education opportunities for all (TESOL, 2016).

More than 40 years has passed since the historic decision of the 1974 *Lau v. Nichols* U.S. Supreme Court case where educational entities must address language barriers preventing ELs from full participation in quality educational programs. This has allowed for many years of research to contribute to the body of knowledge regarding equitable educational access and meeting the needs of ELs. Robinson-Cimpian,

Thompson, and Umansky (2016) state that “oftentimes, education policies and practices create barriers for ELs to achieve access and outcomes that are equitable to those of their non-EL peers” (p. 129).

There is a well-documented urgency to meet the educational needs of ELs, eliminate social and academic barriers to their learning, and to provide an intentional focus on a program design to address the students’ needs.

Continuous school reform efforts in the U.S. shine a spotlight on high academic standards and are important guiding principles for improved academic performance in schools (Tucker & Coddling, 1998 as cited in Echevarria, Short, & Powers, 2006). ESEA has been reauthorized eight times since its 1965 inception in an attempt to keep up with shifting demands in education and the nation as a whole.

The highly publicized No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act of 2001 highlighted the role of the federal government in terms of oversight, mandates, and accountability, and expanded assessment requirements in core academic subject areas. NCLB constituted a major step forward in the accountability for our nation’s youth, particularly in the progress of many marginalized subgroups of students who had been traditionally overlooked (e.g., low-income students, students of color, ELs, and students with disabilities).

In 2015, ESEA reauthorized again as the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) and was signed into law by President Barack Obama. ESSA offers more autonomy and flexibility to states and local education agencies, and reduces the federal government’s role in mandating state education policy (TESOL, 2016). While the basic design of ESSA is the same as NCLB, there is a noticeable shift in authority of accountability systems and

interventions from the federal government to the individual states and school districts.

Title III of ESSA, is a federal formula-funded grant program for ELs that emphasizes English language instruction and the attainment of English proficiency as soon as possible, while simultaneously meeting the same academic standards in ELA and mathematics as the students' English-speaking peers. Title III helps provide focus to "ensure that children who are limited English proficient, including immigrant children and youth, attain English proficiency, develop high levels of academic attainment in English, and meet the same challenging state academic content and student academic achievement standards as all children are expected to meet" (ESEA, Section 3201[1]). Title III also states that "ELs must show increased academic achievement in content areas each year, while simultaneously progressing in their English language proficiency" (U.S. Department of Education, 2017).

It is well documented that teachers face considerable challenges to provide learning environments that encourage all students, no matter the demographic, be equally successful (Braun, Wang, Jenkins, & Weinbaum, 2006; Milner, 2010; Sadker, Sadker, & Zittleman, 2009, as cited in Curran & Peterson, 2017). However, despite the many attempts at school reform, discrepancies in academic performance between ELs and their peers remain noticeable (Aud, Fox, & Kewalramani, 2010).

With the increase in diversity in public school systems, there is a high probability that many teachers have students in their classrooms whom English is not their first language. "ELs are the nation's fastest-growing student population, yet they are disproportionately underserved and underachieving" (Olsen, 2014, p. 2). Based on this information, the need to adequately educate ELs is more pressing with the increase in

numbers and the widening gap in academic achievement as compared with their English-proficient peers.

No matter the reasons for the arrival of ELs into our classrooms, every educator is obligated to understand the dynamics behind diverse cultures in their schools and provide appropriate core-subject-area and English language development services to the students.

Expectations of educators across the nation are further emphasized through day-to-day scheduling, lesson planning, and professional learning focused at the school and district levels. Federal and state mandates have issued compliance guidelines, regulations, and other audits which require schools to ensure equitable opportunities for ELs to participate in public education. This includes; a guaranteed, rigorous, and viable curriculum; access to grade-level content instruction that is differentiated to meet the student needs at the appropriate language proficiency level; the requirement that students meet proficiencies on content assessments; and on-time graduation from high school — a very tall order for school staff and principals.

Wright (2015) notes that “all educators, elementary and secondary teachers, special-education and literacy specialists, administrators, English as a Second Language and bilingual educators — share responsibility for ELL education” (p. v). All educators must work collaboratively to plan, problem solve, and make key instructional decisions for ELs. More importantly, these decisions must be grounded in the understanding of how ELs learn and process information, acquire a second language, and how academic content is presented to maximize the learners’ comprehension.

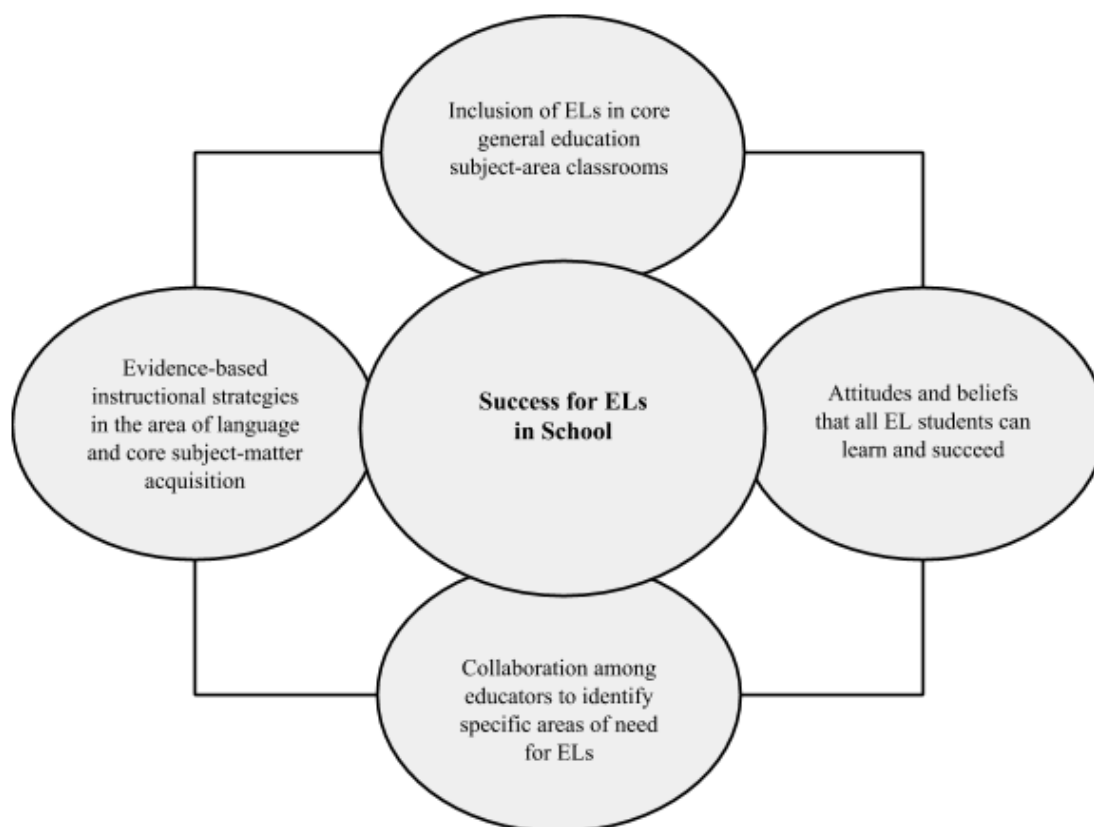
Based on the work of Fenner (2014), the following theoretical framework (Figure 2) has been identified by the researcher for the inclusion of ELs in middle school general

education classes and will be utilized for this study. It is the belief of the researcher that if the following conditions are met then EL students will be successful at school and meet the same core academic standards as their English-speaking peers.

- EL students are included in general core-subject-area classes;
- teachers have asset-based attitudes and beliefs that EL students can learn and succeed;
- specific integrated instructional supports in the area of language and core-subject-matter acquisition are provided to students, and
- educators collaborate to identify specific areas of need for ELs,

Figure 2

Conditions for Successful ELs in School



In conjunction with Fenner's conceptual framework, educators should also consider evidence-based programming, teaching strategies, learning strategies, and lesson

planning practices when providing effective education to ELs as part of their education plan.

NDE Rule 15 further states that districts shall “choose and implement a program model that is systematic, educationally sound in theory and effective practice, enables students to increase English proficiency and meet academic standards, and allows for meaningful access to programs and activities available to all students” (pp. 16-17). Some program models developed for ELs include: newcomer programs, pull-out support, sheltered instruction, co-teaching or in-class supports, dual language education, transitional bilingual programs, or EL instructional coaching.

A “Dear Colleague” letter, issued in January 2015 by the U.S. Department of Education (ED) and the U.S. Department of Justice (DOJ), provided guidance to “assist State Education Agencies (SEAs), school districts, and all public schools in meeting their legal obligation to ensure that EL students can participate meaningfully and equally in education programs and services” (U.S. Department of Education and U.S. Department of Justice, 2015, para. 4).

The letter also outlines obligations and common civil-rights concerns which can result in compliance issues by school districts and SEAs. Both ED and DOJ strongly encourage all school districts to specifically review and address the following areas:

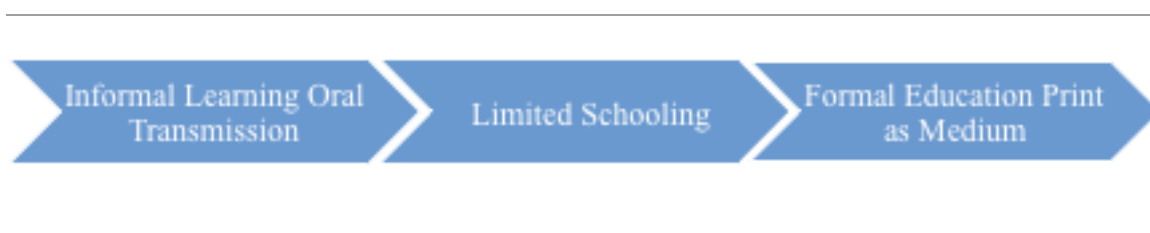
1. Provide EL students with a language assistance program or services;
2. Provide meaningful access to all curricular and extracurricular programs;
3. Access to core curriculum;
4. Access to specialized and advanced courses and programs;
5. Unnecessary segregation of students;
6. Evaluate EL students for special education services when appropriate, and provide special education and English language services;
7. Meet the needs of EL students who opt out of EL programs or particular EL services;
8. Monitor and exit EL students from EL programs and services;

9. Evaluate the effectiveness of a district's EL program;
10. Ensure meaningful communication with limited English proficiency (LEP) parents. (Dear Colleague Letter, January 7, 2015)

When considering an education plan for ELs, Marshall and DeCapua (2013) address a divide between informal learning and Western-style formal education that creates barriers in EL student learning and their academic progress. They describe that ELs “often lack age-appropriate literacy skills and are somewhere on the continuum between orality and literacy” (pp. 6-7). ELs still prefer the oral mode of language and find the prescribed use of literacy as the basis for learning as “arduous and unnatural” (p. 7). Figure 3, (adapted from Marshall, 1998, as cited in Marshall & DeCapua, 2013), illustrates this continuum with informal learning and oral transmission placed at the left end of the continuum and Western-style formal education and literacy on the right. This continuum provides a generalizable lens for examining the implications of EL students entering the U.S. formal educational system and states that many students arrive in our schools with a new language and are expected to move to the right side of the continuum at a very fast pace.

Figure 3

Ways of Learning Continuum (adapted from Marshall, 1998)



August, Estrada, and Boyle (2012) stress that “the need to adequately serve ELs is more pressing as the numbers of ELs increase and their achievement continues to be poor

in comparison to their English-proficient peers,” and that achievement gaps between the groups of students continues to be an issue (p. 2). The National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) echoes the concern through National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) data for eighth-grade students in reading. NAEP, known as the “Nation’s Report Card”, is a common assessment given to a representative group of students across the country and used to determine how students are performing academically in a variety of subject areas. NCES (2011) indicated that 78 percent of non-ELs nationwide performed at, or above, basic levels in reading (with 35 percent of those at, or above, proficiency), yet only 29 percent of ELs performed at, or above, basic levels in reading (with only 3 percent of those at, or above, proficiency).

The purpose of this descriptive case study was to examine the implementation of inclusive practices as part of the LIEP for ELs in middle schools at a selected Midwestern metropolitan public school district. The review of literature outlines specific descriptors of suggested LIEPs designed to serve ELs in a school system, and then is organized into the following sections: (1) inclusion of ELs in the general core-subject-area classroom; (2) beliefs and attitudes of educators regarding inclusion and inclusive practices for ELs; (3) instructional strategies for ELs; and (4) educator collaboration to meet the needs of ELs. The literature review was conducted to provide discourse to the primary research question of the study: How is a Midwestern public school district implementing inclusive practices as part of its LIEP to address the needs of middle school ELs?

Language Instruction Educational Programs (LIEPs)

Educators working with students have the task of addressing the individual needs of all students, and ELs are no exception. Identified ELs having difficulty with speaking,

reading, writing, or understanding the English language are at a real disadvantage when required to meet a state's assessment proficiency levels and need specialized attention and supports. Bond, Waring & Forte (2012) report findings from a large-scale longitudinal study that if ELs are simply placed in general education classrooms with no other considerations or specialized supports, they fare the worst on academic indicators and outcomes.

In a review of foundational literature regarding various LIEPs, the U.S. Department of Education clarifies that no matter the type of LIEP, academic benefits can be realized among ELs who are provided specialized instruction and other services tailored to their needs (U.S. Department of Education, 2012).

With these factors in mind, Short and Boysen (2012), state that districts and schools must consider overarching theoretical components during the planning and implementation of specialized programs for ELs, which include:

1. District or school mission and vision.
2. Programmatic and instructional design of a LIEP.
3. Structural elements.
4. Approaches to instruction and specialized teaching strategies.
5. Instructional resources and program learning goals and objectives.
6. Culturally responsive teaching approaches and other needed supports.

Other factors such as age, grade level, schedules, course offerings, instructional materials, assessment, social-emotional supports, interaction opportunities with native English peers, and structured plans to transition students to general education classrooms must also be carefully considered (Short & Boysen, 2012). To aggravate the issue, schools may be unprepared or lack the understanding and specialized programming to adequately address students cultural, linguistic, and academic needs (Walker, n.d.).

To help address some of the programmatic concerns for ELs in Nebraska, Mid-

continent Research for Education and Learning (McREL), NDE, and other identified public education professionals across the state were tasked to create NDE Rule 15 to address the needs of ELs in Nebraska public schools. NDE Rule 15, signed by the governor in 2012 and revised in 2018, has assisted Nebraska school districts in their own local guidance when developing EL program services for students. Having NDE Rule 15 guidelines available assisted the researcher in understanding basic program structures when considering evidence-based LIEPs and the supports for ELs to ensure successful schooling.

The NDE Rule 15 Guide for Implementation, Section 004, states that a quality indicator of a LIEP is to help ELs acquire English in order to be successful in school where academic content is taught in English. The specific program chosen is also effective and “values the cultural and linguistic diversity of the student” (NDE Rule 15, p. 15). NDE Rule 15 describes the components of the LIEP as:

[d]esigned to support the EL student in English-language acquisition, and must be: (1) a systematic approach to teaching English, (2) educationally sound in theory and effective in practice as recognized by experts in the field of language acquisition, (3) designed to help English Learners increase English proficiency and meet academic standards, and (4) designed to allow for meaningful access to programs and activities that are available to all students including, if appropriate, special education. (2018, p. 16)

As outlined in Table 1, NDE Rule 15 provides several program models and their basic characteristics as suggestions to guide public school districts when considering how to best provide program services to ELs. Currently, the Office of Civil Rights (OCR) and other federal laws do not dictate or require any particular program, and there is little research available (and some controversy) to support the superiority of one over another (U.S. Department of Education, n.d.). However, according to the Nebraska ELL Program

Guide for Administrators, federal law does require programs that educate ELs to:

1. Be based on sound educational theory;
2. Be adequately supported;
3. Have adequate and effective staff and resources so that the program has a realistic chance of success; and
4. Be periodically evaluated and, if necessary, revised (2013, p. 9).

Table 1

Language Instruction Educational Programs Proposed by NDE (NDE Rule 15, pp. 17-19)

Program Model/Description
<p>Newcomer Program</p> <p>Characteristics</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Students acquire beginning English-language skills in addition to core academic skills Helps students acculturate to the U.S. school system and community • May utilize native language • Designed to meet the needs of recent immigrants • Designed to meet the needs of students with limited and/or interrupted formal education (SLIFE) • Intended as a short-term program <p>Student Profile & Class Make-up</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Classes are composed of only EL students • Implemented at both the elementary and secondary level <p>Teacher Profile</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Taught by a teacher with an English as a Second Language (ESL) endorsement -or- • Teacher receives professional development in EL strategies to meet the language needs of students
<p>Sheltered Instruction</p> <p>Characteristics</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Focus is on learning academic content while developing English-language skills • May include some native language support • Use of comprehensible language, physical movement, and visuals • Instructional approach makes academic instruction in English understandable to EL students • Use of both content and English Language Proficiency (ELP) standards <p>Student Profile & Class Make-up</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Classes are comprised typically of all EL students • Classes include students from any language background

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Typically implemented at the secondary level; however, may also be appropriate for elementary <p>Teacher Profile</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Teacher endorsed in the content area and has an ESL endorsement -or- Teacher endorsed in the content areas and receives professional development in EL strategies to meet the language needs of students
<p>EL Pull-Out Program</p> <p>Characteristics</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> English-language instruction is provided outside of the mainstream classroom in a small group setting Students spend the majority of the day in the mainstream classroom with instructional supports, as needed <p>Student Profile & Class Make-up</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Small groups comprised of all EL students Small groups include students from any language background <p>Teacher Profile</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Taught by a teacher with an ESL endorsement -or- Teacher receives professional development in EL strategies to meet the language needs of students
<p>EL Push-In/In-class Supports</p> <p>Characteristics</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> English-language instruction is provided within the mainstream classroom which may: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> make use of co-teaching with an EL specialist make use of coaching/consulting with an EL specialist be the classroom teacher providing the English language instruction EL students served in mainstream classrooms receive instruction in English with some native language support, as needed and/or available Common in districts or buildings with low numbers of EL students, but used in districts of any size <p>Student Profile & Class Make-up</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Classes are comprised of EL and English-speaking students <p>Teacher Profile</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Taught by a teacher with an ESL endorsement -or- Teacher receives professional development in EL strategies to meet the language needs of students
<p>Dual Language Program</p> <p>Characteristics</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Serves both native-English speakers and speakers of another language concurrently Instruction is provided in both languages Both groups become bilingual, bi-literate, and bicultural, learn academic content in two languages, and develop cross-cultural understanding

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Generally offered as one of several EL program options available with choice by parents • District commitment to long-term programming so as to provide the opportunity for proficiency in both languages <p>Student Profile & Class Make-up</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Classes are comprised of EL and English-speaking students <p>Teacher Profile</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Utilizes bilingual teachers with content endorsement • English teacher is ESL endorsed or receives professional development in EL strategies
<p>Transitional Bilingual</p> <p>Characteristics</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Instruction provided in both English and native language • Some bilingual programs transition to English-only sheltered instruction in 2 to 3 years while others provide additional years of bilingual support • Generally offered as one of several EL program options available with choice by parents <p>Student Profile & Class Make-up</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Classes are comprised generally of only EL students with the same native language <p>Teacher Profile</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Utilizes bilingual teachers with content endorsement • English teacher is ESL endorsed or receives professional development in EL strategies

Much of the research found suggests that the least-effective model of teaching English and academic content is “pull-out” support (unless EL students need to learn immediate “survival English”). Pull-out program models include small group instruction by a teacher who provides English language development to students outside the general education classrooms throughout the day. Even though this is an opportunity for students to receive explicit, specialized, or skill-based instruction, there can be compromising issues when pulling students out of general education classrooms.

To illustrate some of the concern, related research regarding pull-out services for EL students indicated that removing students from the classroom places them in “EL-only” settings with a high probability of missing rigorous core curriculum and

instruction; denies full access to educational opportunities; inappropriately places students based on their English proficiency; isolates students from their English-speaking peers, which denies them learning English from their native English-speaking classmates; and may not have the full opportunity to develop their academic English on a day-to-day basis.

At the other end of the spectrum, Dual Language Education (DLE) is garnering noteworthy support and is backed by significant research demonstrating the cognitive advantages of bilingualism (Lindholm-Leary, 2012; Thomas & Collier, 2003, 2004, 2012; Watzinger-Tharp, Swenson, & Mayne, 2016). The core principle of dual-language programs includes components of holistic development of students in which teachers and students work together to meet, or exceed, the academic standards of ELA, mathematics, science and social studies at each grade level through the development of two languages (Thomas & Collier, 2012).

“Two-way dual language immersion programs teach ELs and native English speakers together” (e.g., English and Spanish) and confer full proficiency and mastery of the curriculum in two languages” (Thomas & Collier, 2003, 2012). The school (or school district’s) core-subject-area curriculum and instructional resources are powerful avenues to fully develop a native language as well as acquire a second language. Collier and Thomas (2004) state that “dual language programs are astoundingly successful, in comparison to other bilingual/ESL programs” (p. 12) and that dual-language education has shown promise to strategic expansion of thinking skills, and oral and written forms of language, and eventually reaching native-like proficiency in two languages.

There also is strong evidence that ELs who get instruction in their native language have more evident successes in their education. Collier and Thomas (2004) have identified dual language programs as the only ones that close achievement gaps between ELs and their peers in the long term and “lead to grade-level and above-grade-level achievement in second language, the only programs that fully close the gap” (Collier & Thomas, 2004, p. 11).

However, in synthesizing some of the research, dual-language programs come with their share of challenges and barriers. These barriers include; a national concern of qualified teachers to support the dual-language model, program implications for schools that serve students who speak a variety of languages, and that by simply adopting DLE and some portions of the model does not equate to bilingualism and/or successful academic outcomes for students.

Within any of the language programs outlined above by NDE Rule 15, and no matter the classroom setting where students are becoming bi/multilingual, translanguaging is a sociolinguistic and/or a pedagogical consideration whereby teachers and students collectively build an environment of different languages to learn in deep and creative ways. Garcia (2009) notes that translanguaging “is an approach to bilingualism that is centered not on languages as has been often the case, but on the practices of bilinguals that are readily observable” (p. 45). Translanguaging methodology deploys a speakers “full linguistic repertoire” and “shows educators how to leverage, or use to maximum advantage, the language practices of their bilingual students and communities while addressing core content and language development standards” (Garcia, Johnson, Selzer, & Valdes (2017). Williams (1994, 2002) discusses this pedagogy where students

alternate languages during their learning for the purpose of receptive or productive use (as cited in Garcia, Johnson, Selzer & Valdes, 2017, p. 2).

Regardless of the LIEP chosen to meet the need of ELs, there are larger factors that remain unanswered. Many school districts are unprepared to meet the needs of ELs because of a lack of resources, teachers who are unprepared to work with culturally and linguistically diverse students, weak program models, inappropriate or inconsistent implementation of quality LIEPs, or the implications of a variety of languages spoken.

Another complex issue lies in addressing the needs of “late-entrant” or SLIFE students who have missed some, or all, schooling in their home country and trail their grade-level peers, putting them at an additional disadvantage. Schools must first help students adapt to a new culture, teach English survival skills, and support and bridge language and academic content gaps before students enter into general education classrooms (U.S. Department of Education, 2016). In SLIFE cases, Short (2017) stresses that the “gaps in their education do not reflect a lack of intelligence or motivation to learn, just the lack of opportunity” (as cited in Custodio & O’Loughlin, 2017).

An area lacking in NDE Rule 15 and other literature is clear and specific guidance surrounding inclusive practices and specific supports for general education teachers in addressing the teaching and learning needs of ELs. This is especially true when an EL is not being supported by an educator who has been specifically trained in language acquisition and language development methodology.

For this study, the researcher focused on inclusion of ELs in the general education, core-subject-area classrooms (ELA, mathematics, science, and social studies) and the implementation of inclusive practices to meet their educational needs. After an

extensive search for literature regarding the inclusion of middle school ELs in the core-subject-area classes, and the resulting best practices, a brief historical look at inclusion of students, and its purpose, seemed necessary.

Inclusion

Accountability measures in education have influenced student academic and social progress and despite student abilities, school programs must meet their individual needs (Dukes and Lamar-Dukes, 2009). Political and community pressures over the past several decades have created stress in school leaders when making sure they are serving each student.

The concept of inclusion stemmed from the field of special education (SPED) and is defined as “the process by which educators provide appropriate supports and services to students with disabilities in the least restrictive environment, namely the general education classroom” (Idol, 2006). Further, there is key emphasis on the fact that there is not one method to practice inclusive education, however, there is an underlying belief that “all professionals are responsible to promote the academic and social development of all students” (p. 17).

In the “Handbook of Research on Classroom Diversity and Inclusive Education Practice,” Yell and Christle share historical antecedents of inclusion in educational programs for students with disabilities across the country. Within the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) are regulations stating that “inclusion is the philosophical belief that students with disabilities should be educated in general education classrooms with their age and grade appropriate peers who do not have disabilities” (as cited in Curran & Peterson, 2017, p. 28). They go on to discuss two

pioneers of special education, Dr. Maynard Reynolds and Dr. Evelyn Deno, who believed that students with disabilities should be educated alongside their nondisabled peers, whenever appropriate, and in the importance to develop models to help ensure that students with disabilities are integrated systematically into general classroom settings.

The educational theory of inclusion and inclusive practices stems from commonalities in learning, environment, and curriculum. In “Together We Learn Better: Inclusive Schools Benefit All Children,” five key ways in which inclusive practices build a capacity to educate all learners effectively are addressed by the Inclusive Schools Network. These include:

1. Differentiated instruction increases student engagement;
2. Academic supports help each student access the full curriculum;
3. Behavioral supports help maintain a positive learning environment for everyone;
4. Respect for diversity creates a welcoming environment for all;
5. Inclusive practices make effective use of a school’s resources. (2015, p. 1)

Further, IDEA requires that, “[To] the maximum extent appropriate, children with disabilities, including children in public or private institutions or other care facilities, are educated with children who are not disabled, and that special classes, separate schooling, or other removal of children with disabilities from the regular educational environment occurs only when the nature or severity of the disability is such that education in regular classes with the use of supplementary aids and services cannot be achieved satisfactorily” (IDEA, United States Code [U.S.C.], Title 20, Section 1412, pp. 32-33).

Inclusive practices in the world of special education can definitely present challenges. However, research points to more benefit of inclusion as compared with any difficulties it can present.

It is important to note that students learning English are not considered to have a disability (unless identified through the special-education process). However, having a basic understanding of inclusion in the field of special education can help us form a frame of understanding for inclusion for ELs in general education classrooms. For the purpose of this study, the mechanisms by which these supports and services are formulated are referred to as inclusive practices for ELs, but can have their benefits for all students involved.

Inclusion of ELs in the General Education Classrooms

Even though research surrounding second-language acquisition has been both substantial and productive during the past 25 years, the literature review of inclusion of ELs, specifically in middle school content-area classrooms, is limited. As educators are seeing an increase of ELs entering their schools and classrooms, an urgency to support students in their language acquisition and content knowledge so they can be successful in school becomes paramount. For all educators to design the best learning environments for ELs, they must thoroughly consider the philosophical and theoretical views of second-language acquisition experts and other best practice methods of supports tailored to the specific needs of ELs.

As a well-known authority on second-language acquisition, Dr. Jim Cummins, points out the implications for general education teachers when educating ELs. In his work with the Frankfort International School, Cummins states, “We should not assume that non-native speakers who have attained a high degree of fluency and accuracy in everyday spoken English have the corresponding academic language proficiency” (Shoebottom, n.d., para. 1). The Frankfort International School verifies that general

education teachers and other educators who have knowledge of Cummins' theories, should follow his research and act on his advice, resulting in a more effective stance to support ELs in their classes.

Zigler and Weiss (1985) discuss what works in EL program effectiveness, yet it “must go beyond the question of whether or not a program ‘works’, to ask what works, for whom, how, when, and why” (as cited in Honigsfeld & Dove, 2010, p. 13). With increasing numbers of ELs in general education classrooms, there are a number of practices to consider when making the determination of how to best serve students.

Honigsfeld and Dove (2010) describe how to benefit ELs through a framework of collaborative and integrated teaching practices, especially for general education teachers who may have had no formal training in EL pedagogy. The authors define key concepts related to teacher collaboration and co-teaching practices when educating ELs. All teachers must also be in a position to advocate for the teaching and learning of their ELs and mindful of the distinct challenges of these students, along with their various individual needs.

In a dissertation titled, “Inclusion of English Language Learners in a Mainstream Classroom: A Case Study of the Beliefs and Practices of One Elementary Teacher,” Fox (2009) explores the wide variance in an EL's educational background, the level of English language proficiency, level of first language literacy, and their home country experiences. This also includes differences in family circumstances, such as the parents' educational and socioeconomic backgrounds, and that an EL's academic, language, social and emotional needs vary. Fox notes that one of the noticeable needs of ELs is ongoing English language support. Less well known, but equally important, is an EL's need for

continuous support in the development of his or her native language. When considering secondary level ELs (middle and high school), Olsen describes the seven basic principles key to successfully educating them:

1. Urgency;
2. Distinct needs;
3. Language, literacy and academics;
4. Home language;
5. The three Rs: rigor, relevance and relationships;
6. Integration;
7. Active engagement. (2014, pp. 18-19)

In “The State of Inclusive Practices for ELs in Georgia Elementary Schools: A Mixed Methods Study of the ESOL Push-In Model,” research contends that “some studies have shown that ELs are more academically successful in inclusive instructional settings due to several factors” (Galang, 2015).

Theoharis (2007), Abdallah, (2009), and Honigsfeld & Dove, (2010) agree that some of the factors include; that ELs remain in the classroom with their non-EL peers, thus decreasing their marginalized status in school, ELs increase their development of social language through interactions with non-EL peers in classroom dialogue, and ELs are not missing valuable instruction content and time. (as cited in Galang, 2015).

Thomas and Collier (1997) discuss EL inclusion but warn educators that inclusion should not be confused with EL submersion, which is the outdated practice of the “sink or swim” model by placing students in general education without appropriate supports. Successful and intentional integration of ELs into the general education population, and how general education teachers support them, lies at the core of this study.

Beliefs and Attitudes

Research on the attitudes of teachers and other educators regarding the inclusion

of special-education students in the mainstream is available. However, based on an extensive search of the Google Scholar and Education Resources Information Center (ERIC) databases for research in the area of beliefs and attitudes of inclusion and inclusive practices for ELs in general education classrooms (especially at the middle school level), information is limited.

The high-stakes accountability systems set in place for public school systems have created stressors for teachers and administrators, and including ELs into classrooms is challenging, but necessary. The demands may not always include negative feelings about having ELs in general education settings. However, a lack of teacher exposure to culturally and linguistically diverse students, a disconnect in specific EL teaching and learning strategies, and the need for more opportunities and experiences around multicultural education offered to preservice teachers would be of great help (Youngs & Youngs, 2001).

Young (1999) contends that ESL research “has paid scant attention to the relationship between the ESL specialist and the classroom teacher, or to the perceptions and attitudes of regular classroom teachers toward LEP (limited English proficient) students” (as cited in Dekutoski, 2011, p. 15). Further, it is not solely the general education classroom teachers’ perceptions, but all educators’ perceptions regarding the inclusion of ELs in general education classrooms that are important to this study.

In a dissertation titled, “Secondary Teacher Attitudes Toward Including English-Language Learners in Mainstream Classrooms,” Reeves (2006), addresses a general welcoming and unwelcoming of attitudes of teachers in regard to ELs when included in the mainstream (or general education) classrooms. Reeves’ dissertation addresses factors

in a body of research that may influence the welcoming and unwelcoming nature of the attitudes of educators and includes three important areas:

1. Teacher perceptions of the impact of EL inclusion on themselves;
2. The impact of inclusion on the learning environment;
3. Teacher attitudes and perceptions of ELs in general (p. 131).

Reeves (2006) generally finds that teachers hold a positive and welcoming attitude toward ELs, but did not find that all teachers believed that all students benefited from inclusion in the general education classrooms. Teachers also considered themselves untrained in the area of EL methods and strategies, and harbored a mediocre tolerance when needing to modify coursework to meet the learning needs of the students. A further notation focused on the perception of general education teachers that EL specialists or others who are actually trained in ESL pedagogy are primarily responsible for educating ELs and that it was not necessarily the job of general education teachers to attend to ELs specific learning needs. Finally, a general lack of time for accommodating ELs, difficulty in modifying instruction and the consideration of scaffolding supports, and a lack of professional development in EL best practices was recognized.

Pettit (2011) also synthesizes the literature on the beliefs' teachers hold toward ELs in classrooms and highlights the importance of teachers reflecting on their own attitudes as related to their teaching practices. These beliefs include:

1. High expectations for EL students;
2. Accepting responsibility for ELs;
3. Encouraging native language use at home and school;
4. Awareness of the time it takes for ELs to master academic English; and
5. A desire for professional development in relation to ELs.

Lenz (2016) encourages educators to center on an assets-based ideology for ELs and advocates focusing on “strengths and assets and the unique potential of our ELs.”

She asks of educators: “What brilliance might be unleashed? What confidence might be built? What might non-EL students learn from ELs?” (para. 2).

Finally, Walker, Shafer, and Iiams (2004) find that even if there are small percentages of negative attitudes or beliefs among teachers who teach ELs, it can have detrimental effects. “Negative attitudes are quick to develop but slow to change” (p. 156). The literature points to the need for teachers, as well as other staff, to hold assets-based ideologies toward ELs incorporated into general education classrooms and the entire school community itself.

Instructional Strategies

To develop the best instructional programs for ELs, educators must understand students’ diverse backgrounds, cultures, and their social and academic abilities in their native language. This knowledge can be used to incorporate effective philosophies and techniques into teacher instructional practice. In “What Teachers Should Know About Instruction for English Language Learners,” it is reported that rigorous research studies on effective instruction for ELs are, unfortunately, all too rare (Duessen, Autio, Miller, Lockwood, & Stuart, 2008), and when specifically considering adolescent middle-school-age ELs and their educational needs, the research is limited. However, since the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) was signed into law in 2002, the scholarship surrounding how educators and school districts should best educate ELs has decidedly increased. Further, the “National Council of Teachers of English recognizes that all teachers of English language learners must have specialized content knowledge and skills in the area of ESL methodology in order to effectively teach and engage students” (Hernandez, 2009).

McLaughlin (1992) and TESOL, Inc. (1997) note that for ELs to learn new academic content in a language, there are common misconceptions of teaching ELs and of second-language development. The first two of these misconceptions, or “myths,” help to focus on the purpose of this qualitative case study.

Myth No. 1: Once an ELL has gained a fluent oral ability, that student has learned enough English to successfully manage in the mainstream classes.

Myth No. 2: English immersion is good for ELL students, because the more English they have (and the less they use their first language), the sooner they will learn English. (as cited in Verplaetse & Migliacci, 2008, pp. 5-6)

These myths are important to highlight because as ELs gain oral English proficiency, the misconception that students are proficient enough to exit from specialized programming, or are fully capable of handling academic content in core subject matter (in English) is difficult for educators to measure. Regarding the second myth, full English immersion is similar to the “sink or swim” model and does not rely on a second language as a resource to acquire English. English immersion differs from dual language immersion in the fact that dual language immersion utilizes a partner language (i.e., Spanish) for at least half of the instructional day and “fosters bilingualism, biliteracy, enhanced awareness of linguistic and cultural diversity, and high levels of academic achievement through instruction in two languages” (Dual Language Education of New Mexico, para. 3).

Krashen and Terrell (1983) describe their hypotheses regarding the natural and predictable stages of learning a second language. The natural approach encompasses language acquisition (using language for real communication) and the predictable approach by language learning (the formal or explicit knowledge of language). According to Krashen and Terrell, students move through five predictable stages when learning a

second language: Preproduction, Early Production, Speech Emergence, Intermediate Fluency, and Advanced Fluency. Considering the stages of second-language acquisition and the time it potentially takes ELs to perform on par with their English-speaking peers, Thomas and Collier (1997) propose that this creates serious implications in teaching ELs. These notions together make it important for teachers to understand the stages of second-language acquisition, time factors, and other variables, and incorporate that knowledge into the initial design and adaptations of their instructional strategies.

As more ELs enter general education classrooms, educators must realize their classrooms include students who are at various stages of second-language acquisition, and the necessity to make accommodations in their instruction to meet the needs of individuals. Effective instructional strategies for ELs in content-area classrooms are growing through research by experts in the field (e.g., culturally responsive teaching, comprehensible input, scaffolding, and strategies focused on linguistic demands), but educators are unsure of how these strategies are carried out in practice.

“In sheltered content classes, English Learners participate in a content course where the general education teacher delivers grade-level objectives through modified instruction that makes the information comprehensible to the students while promoting the students’ academic English development” (Echevarria et al., 2013). Other instructional strategies important for teachers to incorporate into their lesson delivery are promoted in the Sheltered Instruction Observation Protocol (SIOP) for general education teachers to consider when teaching ELs (Echevarria et al., 2013).

A 2015 Hanover Research report titled, “Best Practices in Inclusive Instruction for ELLs,” states, “While there are numerous EL instructional models, the literature does

not offer a standardized taxonomy of these models, due in large part to the complexity of implementation” (p. 5). For the purpose of this study, and considering the appropriate instructional programming and academic supports for ELs in middle schools, a closer look at inclusive practices will be researched in an attempt to convey the notion that all ELs can succeed as learners and achieve the same performance outcomes expected of all students.

Throughout the review of literature, a theme surfaced that the program of instruction for ELs must be intentional and effective in order for students to be successful in their educational experience and their future. However, in consideration of how to best serve ELs in an educational environment, it is key that policymakers, educators, and the public should understand that all students learning English as an additional language are not alike (Echevarria, Short, & Powers, 2006). Schools and districts that work with ELs must recognize ELs’ heterogeneity and those considerations when structuring appropriate language instruction educational plans and services.

Despite the best intentions of educators, and the placement of EL students in specialized instructional programs, without the use of EL-specific strategies and targeted language instruction, ELs are not granted equal access to curriculum content required by law. To meet the requirement, ELs need instruction tailored to their backgrounds and academic needs and skills, including explicit instruction in academic language (National Education Association, 2015). Effective teaching for language-diverse students emanates from a deep understanding of various perspectives on learning, teaching and knowledge, and the ability to accommodate student needs in the classroom setting.

Collaboration

As outlined in this chapter, there are a multitude of elements that need to come together for educators to teach ELs in rigorous instructional environments (Collier, 1997; Echevarria et al., 2013; Haynes & Zacarian, 2010; Hill & Miller, 2013; Honigsfeld & Dove, 2010; Krashen & Terrell, 1983). Specific considerations must be incorporated when planning instruction around the stages of second-language acquisition, content academic vocabulary, explicit reading and writing instruction, oral language development, and cultural inclusivity and diversity. Even though there is more recognition of the needs of ELs, general education teachers can feel isolated and unprepared when attempting to meet their specific needs. With this in mind, a variety of collaborative endeavors are helping shape the narrative regarding EL student learning and individualized instruction.

According to the Merriam-Webster Collegiate Dictionary, the word collaborate means to “work jointly with others or together, especially in an intellectual endeavor.” Regardless of the LIEP model provided to students, ELs benefit most when educators have time for collaboration to help ensure that ELs receive coherent instruction that builds their English language proficiency at the same time that it increases their knowledge of core-subject-area material.

Honigsfeld and Dove (2010) highlight that the collective expertise of teachers is harnessed through collaborative practices among educators and a whole-school approach. A specific strategy outlined by Gately and Gately (2001) refers to co-teaching and is “the collaboration between general and special education (SPED) teachers on all of the teaching responsibilities for all of the students assigned to a classroom” (as cited in

Honigsfeld & Dove, 2010, p. 6). More recently, co-teaching between the general education content teacher and EL specialist has been promoted as a collaborative partnership on behalf of the education of ELs. To date, there is limited research and resources available for this type of partnership, but the concept looks promising.

To make content comprehensible for ELs included in general education classrooms, all teachers must gain access to instructional strategies that promote academic achievement. This access and understanding of best practice in instruction for ELs must be shared among professionals and is not the sole responsibility of those teachers who hold specialized credentials in ESL. Research in this area also suggests that the collaborative work of teachers that questions traditional teaching methods can contribute to more effective instruction for a diverse student population (Russell, 2012).

DuFour, DuFour, and Eaker (2008) define Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) as “educators committed to working collaboratively in ongoing processes of collective inquiry and action research to achieve better results for their students” (p. 14). PLCs include a collaborative culture that is focused on learning, and the members of the PLC are mutually accountable for the success of every student. PLC structures also create the opportunity for professionals to analyze various types of assessment data and make instructional decisions and adjustments to meet the individual needs of students. The school district where this study took place is actively focusing on the PLC collaborative structure as part of its district priorities and strategic plan, which offers additional information on co-teaching and other collaborative efforts.

Hargreaves (2003) warns that just “sharing (information) is not enough and that expertise is an important criterion for collaboration among teachers” (p. 202). Further,

this sharing “should not be construed as sharing among the skilled and less skilled, the expert and the novice, but among communities of professional equals committed to continuous improvement” (p. 204). Davison (2006) argues that the collaboration of teachers to better the instruction and outcomes for students can be “rare and extremely difficult to sustain” (p. 458). Hargreaves (1994) also discusses the effects of forced or contrived collaboration and that the effectiveness of professionals working together is predictable and not always necessarily effective (as cited in Davison, 2006).

Fenner (2014) describes shared responsibility as “the mind-set that all educators must see themselves as equal stakeholders who must strive to positively influence the education of ELs in the classroom as well as outside of school” (pp. 28-29).

Collaboration is key to a systemic inclusion of EL students in general education classrooms and encourages staff to work toward a common goal or find multiple creative solutions to a problem, issue or concern. The literature review for this study brings the focus back to the proposed conceptual framework, which encompasses the inclusion of ELs in the general education classroom; attitudes and beliefs of educators; effective instructional strategies for ELs; and collaboration, all of which can potentially create educational success for ELs.

Chapter 3

Research Methodology

As U.S. schools continue to become increasingly diverse, the dialogue of including and supporting ELs in general education classrooms demand new ways of thinking. Like all students, ELs need and deserve equitable access to quality educational opportunities, rigorous core instruction and resources, and to engage in high levels of thinking and problem solving. This educational quality requires teachers to provide a content-rich curriculum; clearly articulated, standards-based lessons and tasks; appropriate, grade-level goals and learning targets; well-paced instruction; opportunities for practice of academic language within real-world contexts; appropriate feedback regarding academic progress; and focused reteaching whenever necessary (Echevarria et al., 2013).

In addition to teaching and learning expectations for every student, ELs require further supports in the development of their English so they can be successful with grade-level content. There is considerable research regarding instruction for all students and their findings apply to ELs, but only to a certain point. It was clear within the review of literature that, no matter the LIEP, ELs need additional language acquisition considerations and supports within instruction, especially as they progress through grade levels and as the content expectations become more difficult. This study focused on educators that work with ELs, specifically in the middle school general education content classrooms (ELA, mathematics, science and social studies) and the call for academic supports beyond the norm. In theory and practice, this opens the door to equitable

opportunities for a quality education for ELs, which is a responsibility of all educators in a school system.

Purpose and Research Question

“As the number of English Language Learners continues to increase at lightning speed, the pressure is on for classroom teachers to examine their practices and find new ways of meeting the needs of this ever-growing population of students” (Hilliker, 2018, para. 1). The purpose of this study attempts to describe the use of inclusive practices as part of the LIEP for ELs in middle schools at a selected Midwestern metropolitan public school district. Understanding the current reality of inclusive practice implementation and telling the practioners’ story is the focus of this study. A qualitative case study method allowed the researcher to address and examine the research problem within a contemporary public middle school setting. It also provided meaning and identified themes and patterns that emerged during the process of data collection and analysis (Yin, 2014).

Merriam (2009), discusses the education field as “an applied social science or field of practice precisely because practitioners in this field deal with the everyday concerns of people’s lives” (p. 1). She further describes the interest people have in these fields and the desire to not only know one’s practice, but to improve it. Merriam goes on to say that this can lead to some very researchable questions, some of which are best approached through qualitative research design. The primary and secondary research questions developed for this qualitative study could possibly increase the capacity to understand the implementation of inclusive practices with ELs at the middle school level and have the potential to define their importance and benefits afforded to students. The

following primary and secondary research questions have been identified with respect to the focus of this study:

Primary Research Question

How is a Midwestern public school district implementing inclusive practices as part of their Language Instruction Educational Program (LIEP) to address the needs of middle school English Learners?

Secondary Research Questions

1. What is inclusion for English Learners in the core academic subjects in the middle school (e.g., English language arts, mathematics, science, and social studies)?
2. What are the beliefs and attitudes of middle school educators and administrators about English Learners and their inclusion in general education classrooms?
3. What strategies do general education teachers use to support and include English Learners in middle school classrooms?
4. How are general education teachers in the middle school supported through collaboration and professional learning to meet the needs of English Learners?
5. How do educators and administrators perceive the implementation of inclusive practices for English Learners in the middle school?

Qualitative Research Design

Yin (2016) states that “qualitative research attempts to capture real-life conditions, reflecting the perspectives of the people who are part of these conditions” (p.

76). He also defines five features of qualitative research that help a researcher decide if qualitative research design is appropriate for a study. These include:

1. “Studying the meaning of people’s lives in their real-world roles;
2. Representing the views and perspectives of the people (participants) in a study;
3. Explicitly attending to and accounting for real-world contextual conditions;
4. Contributing insights from existing or new concepts that may help to explain social behavior and thinking;
5. Acknowledging the potential relevance of multiple sources of evidence rather than relying on a single source alone.” (Yin, 2016, p. 9)

Creswell (2014) and Merriam (2009) both describe how qualitative research helps to explore the meaning of people’s lives, how they interpret experiences, and how the researcher understands phenomena and makes meaning of the data. Van Maanen states that “qualitative research is an umbrella term covering an array of interpretive techniques which seek to describe, decode, translate, and otherwise come to terms with the meaning, not the frequency, of certain more or less naturally occurring phenomena in the social world” (as cited in Merriam, 2009, p. 13). When considering these perspectives of respected research authors, a qualitative approach seemed to be the best choice for this study.

As the primary investigator and current Director of Federal Programs in a Nebraska K-12 public school district, the researcher has had nearly 20 years of responsibility (in some form) for the education of ELs at all grade levels. A profound interest in this topic creates an intrinsic desire for the researcher to describe a case in order to make meaning and understand the realities within the teaching of ELs. The intention of this description is to create “naturalistic generalizations” to enable readers to connect the details with their own personal contexts (Stake, 1995).

Creswell (2013) describes case study research and the aspect that it focuses on contemporary and real-life circumstances. Descriptive case studies are among the most common. The case study approach was chosen for this study in an attempt to develop an understanding of how a Midwestern public school district is currently implementing inclusive practices as part of the process to address the needs of middle school ELs. The researcher's intent of this case study is to promote an understanding of inclusive practices utilized in the middle school by providing “thick descriptions” of the data that either confirms what is already known or helps the reader discover new meaning based on their own experiences and understanding (Geertz, 1973, as cited in Stake, 1995, p. 42). Suter (2012) states “to understand a complex phenomenon, you must consider the multiple ‘realities’ experienced by the participants themselves — the ‘insider’ perspectives and that natural environments are favored for discovering how participants construct their own meaning of events or situations” (p. 344).

The researcher gathered necessary data through multiple sources, including; a description of the context, one-on-one interviews, focus group interviews, Professional Learning Community (PLC) observations, and the review of any pertinent documents in order to gain various perspectives aligned with the research questions. This is grounded in the reflective experiences of the researcher in “knowing what leads to significant understanding, recognizing good sources of data, and consciously and unconsciously testing out the veracity of their eyes and the robustness of their interpretations” (Stake, 1995, pp. 49-50).

Throughout the study, the researcher wanted to allow for as much control as possible to the participants and provide rich stories from their voices. Therefore, a variety

of procedures and techniques were employed from the case study inquiry method. As discussed by both Stake (1995) and Merriam (2009), this case study will be situated in a social constructivist paradigm to obtain a truthful description that is currently being experienced by the participants in their educational setting with the goal of providing validation to the findings. With the description as the priority objective, the researcher collected and analyzed data and recounted the phenomenon and context in which the investigation occurred.

When analyzing the data, the direct interpretation method was used to discern meaning about the case and research questions in order to identify “patterns of unanticipated as well as expected relationships” (Stake, 1995, p. 41). Each data source played a significant role in allowing the researcher and the reader to understand the case as if they were personally part of the investigation themselves.

Context of the Study

In the initial design of the study, a purposeful sampling method was identified when considering the site and participant selection and is described in the following sections. The sampling strategy chosen focused on specific criteria that was identified by the researcher who considered the case, the phenomenon of interest, and the research questions. Emmel (2013) describes this as one that addresses the researcher’s judgement and “information rich cases for an in-depth investigation” based on predetermined criteria (p. 40). The focus of this study included the selection of a Midwestern metropolitan public school system with a demographic that lent itself to the research focus.

The school district studied, under the pseudonym Abbott Public Schools (APS), is a Midwestern metropolitan district with students ranging from pre-kindergarten through

the 12th grade. Understanding that enrollment changes on a day-to-day basis, a March 2019 enrollment analysis of APS showed approximately 9,900 students registered, with almost 2,200 of those students registered in the middle grades (grades six through eight).

Approximately 16 percent (1,584) of students attending APS are identified as ELs and are at various stages of English language development as measured by the state-mandated English Language Proficiency Assessment for the 21st Century (ELPA21). According to district records, EL students represent a wide variety of birth countries, including Cuba, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Kenya, Mexico, Somalia, and Sudan. Over 20 languages are spoken in the district, with Spanish (or a Spanish dialect) being the highest, followed by Somali, Arabic, and Q'anjob'al (a Mayan language spoken in Guatemala and parts of Mexico).

A standard racial and ethnic group classification system is used by the U.S. Department of Education which includes; White, Black, Hispanic, Asian/Pacific Islander and Native American. Based on these classifications, a review of the student demographics of APS and their three middle schools, under pseudonyms Shuman Middle School (SMS), Mayer Middle School (MMS), and Paine Middle School (PMS) is listed in Table 2.

Table 2

APS Student Demographic Percent Analysis

	1-Hispanic/ Latino	2-American Indian or Alaska Native	3-Asian	4-Black or African American Islander	5-Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific	6-White	7-More than one race indicated
Shuman Middle School	48.5%	1.0%	1.1%	6.4%	--	40.3%	2.7%
Mayer Middle School	69.3%	0.6%	0.5%	4.9%	0.3%	23.4%	1.0%
Paine Middle School	25.6%	0.5%	1.1%	1.4%	--	69.9%	1.7%
Abbott Public Schools	49.8%	1.0%	1.0%	4.5%	0.1%	41.5%	2.1%

(Abbott Public Schools Demographic Data, March, 2019)

The three middle schools identified to participate in the study (Shuman, Mayer, and Paine) each have varied student demographics. All three campuses include grades six through eight and have a population of EL students with differing levels of English proficiency. In addition, each middle school has access to teachers holding ESL credentials from higher education institutions. However, EL specialist support is disparate according to the percentages of ELs attending each school (Table 3). The researcher felt it important to include these schools in the study in an attempt to understand the use of EL-inclusive practices at different school settings, no matter the number of ELs served or its demographic makeup.

Table 3

Middle School Demographics

School	Total Enrollment	Percentage of ELs	EL Specialists in FTE
Shuman MS	703	9.4%	2.5
Mayer MS	774	13.0%	5
Paine MS	661	3.0%	1

The site locations chosen for the study fit the demographic criteria in order to learn as much as possible about inclusive practices for EL students at their campuses. Currently, all three schools have specialized EL programs and protocols available to students which align with the program recommendations outlined by NDE Rule 15. Having the largest number of ELs enrolled at their schools, both Shuman and Mayer Middle Schools offer newcomer classes that focus specifically on ELA, mathematics, science, and social studies content with English language instruction stressed to gain

access to those content areas. Paine Middle School does not have a newcomer population of students, therefore, no newcomer class has been designated as part of their school EL programming.

All three middle school sites provide EL pullout and co-teaching opportunities for students in order to specifically focus on English language skills to support their success in core academics. Translanguaging pedagogies or dual language services are not offered as part of the program service models of any of the school sites. The level of inclusive practice supports (in the general education classrooms) varies significantly at the each of the schools and was identified throughout the study as a necessary area of focus.

This study offered the potential to reveal inclusive practice strengths and weaknesses which can become opportunities to improve services to ELs on a larger scale. It was also determined that using criterion sampling helped the researcher to focus on the recruitment process to achieve a representation of diversity to include the participant's interests, experiences, positions, training, and expertise at all three middle school sites.

Description of Participants

The participant recruitment criteria for this study was open to all middle school principals (or assistant principals), middle school core-subject-area teachers (ELA, mathematics, science, or social studies), middle school EL specialists, and middle school instructional coaches. During the design phase of the study, the researcher set the participant goal of three principals, nine core subject teachers, nine EL specialists, and four instructional coaches.

After four attempts at recruitment, the participant goal was met, with the exception of the EL specialists (only four of the nine participated). The researcher felt the

number of participants was a representative and acceptable number, and moved forward with the study. Each participant held different teaching credentials, was endorsed at various levels or in specific content areas, or held specialized endorsements and had a variety of years of experience at the school district under study. Table 4 highlights the participant demographics which aligned with the goals of participant recruitment at the onset of the research project.

Table 4

Participant Demographics

Role/Position/Middle School	Area of Concentration	Years Experience in Position
Principal SMS	Administration	1
Principal MMS	Administration	19
Principal PMS	Administration	6
Instructional Coach SMS	ELA	18
Instructional Coach MMS (1)	ELA	25
Instructional Coach MMS (2)	Math	11
Instructional Coach PMS	ELA	28
EL Specialist SMS	EL	4
EL Specialist MMS (1)	EL	1
EL Specialist MMS (2)	EL	7
EL Specialist PMS	EL	2
Middle School Teacher SMS (1)	Math	6
Middle School Teacher SMS (2)	Math	2
Middle School Teacher SMS	Science	9
Middle School Teacher MMS	ELA	3
Middle School Teacher MMS	Math	22
Middle School Teacher MMS	Social Studies	12
Middle School Teacher PMS	ELA	1
Middle School Teacher PMS (1)	Math	4
Middle School Teacher PMS (2)	Math	6

Observations of middle school Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) and the review of any relevant documents were also included as part of the study design to gather facts about how general educators are addressing the academic needs of ELs. All participants were adults (non-students) and are current employees of the school district in which the research was conducted.

The participants were required to be current certified staff members at the chosen middle school sites, and the ages of the participants were above 19 years, with specific age ranges between approximately 25 years to 55 years. Both male and female certified staff members were included in the participant recruitment process as well as those representing various races and ethnicities and years of tenure. English proficiency is a requirement to be employed in this district, so interpreter or translator services were considered, but not required, during any phase of the study.

Role of the Researcher

The researchers' perspective regarding the study's purpose was through the lens of a district-level administrator in the state where the research study took place. The researcher clarified bias by acknowledging educator roles and diverse backgrounds and experiences in EL programming which may be different from the educational experiences represented by each person interviewed or observed. The goal of the study was to describe inclusive practices in place at the middle school sites, not to evaluate or judge what is currently occurring while teaching and supporting their ELs.

In regard to the researcher role, Creswell (2014) states, "this self-reflection creates an open and honest narrative that will resonate well with readers," while also adding validity to the findings (p. 202). A key component of the entire investigation was

the researcher's ability to convey that her role was independent and impartial at each phase, from the initial study design, to the final report of the findings.

Merriam (2009) describes the researcher as "the primary instrument for data collection and analysis," however, this can lead to potential bias that may have an adverse impact on the study (p. 15). Recognizing and communicating bias in any form (with the participants) was a crucial part of the research process as well as providing clarity and honesty so that any part of the research process was not negatively impacted.

Data Collection Method and Data Sources

Yin (2016) states that a collection of a variety of data sources ensures a strong foundation of a research study, including; interviewing, observing, collecting and examining (materials), and feeling (p. 137). However, before data can be collected, proper permission is required to be obtained. When designing this case study, the researcher needed to gain access to sites, people, classrooms, and current or archived documents. Creswell (2013) describes the participants as the "gatekeepers" or "key informants" (p. 94) so the researcher had to secure appropriate approval and access from the school district administration and Institutional Review Board (IRB) before moving forward with any part of the research project.

A meeting was requested of the associate superintendent of the school district, who was provided with a research project description (Appendix A) and was encouraged to ask any questions of the researcher. After approval was granted to conduct the study in the district and IRB approval was obtained, a dissertation recruitment email (Appendix B) was sent to the three middle school lead principals with detailed information of the study, and to request permission to complete the research at their campuses. At this time,

each principal (or an assistant principal designee) was also invited to be part of a focus group interview. Individual meetings were held with each lead principal to describe the research and answer specific questions about the topic, the process, and to review the recruitment documents and procedures.

Principals from identified middle school sites were asked to assist with providing contact information of their teaching staff; help identify and recruit key participants that fit the study criteria; provide their school's PLC meeting schedule; and formally agree to participate in a focus group interview with other participating middle school principals.

Once full permission was secured from the campus principals, a recruitment flyer (Appendix C) was posted in each school break room, and email invitations to participate in the study were sent to all middle school core-subject-area teachers. Ongoing opportunities for one-on-one conversations were available to any interested person to clarify the proposed study and details about their role as a potential participant. With the assistance of the campus principals, emails and phone calls were initiated to ensure the appropriate number of participants was reached. Invitations were also sent to specified groups of teachers, including EL specialists and instructional coaches for focus group interviews. This ensured inclusion of all those identified staff that were deemed critical to the purpose of the study. Follow-up emails were sent throughout November and December 2018 to continue the recruitment process and to confirm those that agreed to participate.

When the participants were identified and had verbally agreed to be part of the study, a Participant Informed Consent form (Appendix D) was provided to them with an explanation of the consent process. The informed consent outlined the purpose of the

study; information on participant criteria; ethical consideration; benefits and risks; details of confidentiality; planned use of the results; and other pertinent information. These forms were disseminated, signed, and collected from each participant and included in the researcher's files.

Clear ethical guidelines were described to the participants to respect their confidentiality and the methods of the data collection, storage, and access of information. Any reference to a participant is by pseudonym only, including any direct quotes or statements from the participants during the interview process.

The core-subject-area teachers who agreed to be part of the study were asked to participate in individual, in-person interviews lasting approximately 60 minutes and scheduled at their convenience during off-contract hours. Semi-structured interviews were held in a quiet location (a conference room at the administration building, school meeting room, or coffee shop) using a Participant Interview Protocol (Appendix E) and were audiotaped and transcribed word for word to be used in the data analysis phase of the study.

All interviews followed a four-phase interview process recommended by Castillo-Montoya (2016), which included: ensuring that the interview questions were aligned with the research question(s); constructing an inquiry-based conversation; gaining feedback on the interview protocol; and piloting the interview protocol with a willing participant not directly connected to the case study. Based on this interview refinement method, the “process will support and strengthen the reliability of the interview protocol used for the study with the intent to improve the quality of data obtained from the interview itself” (p. 811).

Each interview question was deliberately linked to the primary and secondary research questions, with the intent of gathering descriptive information connected to the central phenomenon. The interviews included a “mix of more and less structured interview questions” which allowed for some personalization, flexibility, and a natural flow of conversation (Merriam, 2009, p. 89).

Interviews were conducted during a 10-week period, with nine content-area teachers and three separate focus group sessions. Each focus group was a separate group of professionals including; middle school principals, EL specialists, and instructional coaches who assist students and teachers with instructional strategies in all content areas at each building. The same interview questions were asked of all participants to ensure consistency in the data collected and the fidelity of the overall process. The questions were as follows:

1. What is your name and title?
 - a. If you teach, what subject area(s) do you teach? If more than one, please list your primary area first.
 - b. How long have you been in this position?
2. Tell me about your past and present teaching experiences, especially those experiences that relate to teaching ELs.
3. Describe the ELs you work with and what they bring to your school community. For example, describe the cultures represented, levels of prior education, native language, language backgrounds, assets and educational needs.

4. How would you describe the EL instructional models implemented in your school and who is responsible for this implementation?
5. Define inclusion for ELs in the core academic subject areas.
6. What are examples of inclusive practices to address the academic needs of ELs and what is the level of implementation of these practices in the core-subject-area classroom?
7. Describe evidence-based EL instructional strategies you (or your colleagues) use to support and include ELs in the core-subject-area classrooms.
8. How is a student's native language used in core-subject-area classrooms?
9. Describe your understanding of a dual-language model of instruction for ELs and any benefits or barriers.
10. What is the perception in your building of including ELs in core-subject-area classrooms?
11. Describe ways that you collaborate with colleagues to address the educational needs of ELs in the core-subject-area classroom.
12. How does collaboration, specifically in Professional Learning Communities, support the inclusion of ELs in the core-subject-area classroom?
13. What type of professional learning have you received to support the inclusion of ELs in your classroom?
14. Describe the benefits and the barriers of including EL students in core-subject-area classes.
15. What additional comments do you have concerning the inclusion of EL students in core-subject-area classes?

Guided by the protocol, the interviews respected each participant's time and honored the formality of the process. It was important to include a brief introduction about the purpose of the study, collect the signed consent letter, thank the participants for their time and input, and share the next steps regarding the research analysis and findings process. Each interview was recorded using a digital recording device and transcribed verbatim, organized in computer file folders, and accessed only by the researcher with a secure password.

Any ethical considerations surrounding the data collection, data analysis and dissemination of the findings from this qualitative case study are transparent to the participants. This includes the reason for their participation in the study, the purpose of the study, and the intended use of the findings. Any ethical considerations are clearly defined in the informed consent provided to the participants, and all records, including audiotaped recordings, field notes, and other documents, will be destroyed upon completion of the study.

Middle school principals, EL specialists, and instructional coaches were asked to participate in focus group interviews in separate sessions in a designated conference room at the school district administration building. Focus group interviews were an intentional part of the research design because the researcher believed each group may have some common experiences and may presumably share some common views regarding EL supports at their buildings. At the end of all interview sessions, participants were allowed to share additional comments they had about the inclusion of ELs in the core-subject-area classes, or supports they feel are necessary to their academic success.

In addition to individual interviews or focus groups, the participants were also observed during their PLC meetings using a Professional Learning Community Observation Protocol (Appendix F). These observations took place during the months of January, February and March of 2019. The researcher was a passive observer in all PLC meetings and collected handwritten field notes during each of the observations. Because there are other teachers included on PLC teams who may not have formally agreed to be part of the study, a PLC pre-observation script (Appendix G) was read to the entire group of participating teachers. This script stated the purpose of the study as well as assurance that all statements, quotes, or information heard was held strictly confidential and would not be personally identifiable in any way.

Throughout the study, participants were also asked if they would share any archived or current documents that might be considered additional pieces of evidence to assist the study (e.g., classroom schedules, teachers' schedules, PLC meeting protocols or norms, lesson plans, lesson activities, and district program service documents), if applicable. The PLC data collection process included up to two 45-minute period observations in a classroom setting. The review of documents deemed important to the study was integrated throughout the study, and most were collected during the PLC observations.

All information gathered from the participants was used to potentially add to the insight of current middle school EL inclusive practices and help support instruction for ELs to succeed as learners and achieve the same performance outcomes expected of all students, which could be considered a benefit of the study. However, as was stated in the

informed consent form, participants may not receive any direct benefit from taking part in this research study.

Stake (1995) notes that almost always, the data collection is done on someone else's home ground. This makes case study research very personal for the participants, and a key ethical consideration was to protect the anonymity and confidentiality of those participants (p. 57). He maintains that it is important that researchers exercise caution to minimize any risk by having open and active dialogue with the participants, provide them feedback, and listen closely for any sign of concern.

Throughout all stages of a study, researchers face ethical challenges from planning and designing to reporting findings and must have entry and exit plans during site interviews and observations. Other challenges include anonymity, confidentiality, informed consent and the researcher's potential impact on the participants. It was of paramount importance that the use of practical guidelines and protocols be utilized in all stages of this research.

Strict care was taken that any identifiable information could be transferred or accessed when the interviews and observations were completed. The transcripts contained identifiable information, but it was only accessible by the researcher and was secured in a password-protected computer file in the researcher's locked office. The researcher used confidentiality procedures with the data to protect the identity of all participants, including those appearing in computer records, audio recordings, written field notes, and electronic transcriptions. The researcher also understood this did not solely include individuals' names, but also the names of organizations, sites, and other individuals not directly involved in the research project.

Data Analysis and Validation

Saldaña (2016) addresses data coding by stating “CAQDAS programs can be overwhelming for some, if not most researchers. Your mental energies may be more focused on the software than the data” (p. 29). With this in mind, electronic coding through NVivo12 was considered, but as a novice researcher and the time constraints of the study, manual coding was the preferred method.

The researcher initially analyzed the data by hand-coding the interview transcriptions and PLC observations and writing notes in the margins to document key concepts and themes from the participants. Answers to each interview question and field notes from the PLC observations were copied into Microsoft Word documents for easier access of information and to organize the data into manageable chunks.

Based on the recommendations of Saldaña (2016), a vertical textbox was inserted along the right column of each Word document where comments and codes for the datum could be organized. The hand-coding process was repeated several times and helped to “aggregate the text or visual data into small categories of information, seeking evidence for the code from different databases being used in the study, and then assigning a label to the code” (Creswell, 2013, p.184). Additionally, the coding memos were created to identify themes into “broad units of information that consist of several codes aggregated to form a common idea” (Creswell, 2013, p. 186). The coding system also employed pseudonyms that were used to protect the identity of all sites, participants, and others who may have been mentioned in the data-collection process.

A document was created linking participant names, buildings, and positions with their assigned identification code. The coding document was kept on a secure, password-

protected computer file that was only accessible to the principal researcher. The document will be destroyed on October 10, 2019, after the study has been completed as stated in the IRB.

Several verification procedures were employed “to document the accuracy of the study” (Creswell, 2013, p. 250), which included: triangulation, clarifying researcher bias, and member checks. Stake (1995) states that “all researchers recognize the need not only for being accurate in measuring things but logical in interpreting the meaning of those measurements” (p. 108). The decision was made to include triangulation as a method to make meaningful and clear connections between multiple data sources. Therefore, interviewing identified middle school staff members, completing PLC observations, and reviewing any documents or protocols that had been created for the program services of ELs was imperative.

“Researchers make use of multiple and different sources, methods, investigators, and theories to provide corroborating evidence” (Creswell, 2013, p. 251). The corroboration of evidence from different sources “enhances the trustworthiness of the analysis” (Miles et al., 2014). Accuracy and logic must be part of a researcher’s methodology design, and can be achieved through validation and triangulation. Triangulation is about “present[ing] a substantial body of incontestable description” (Stake, 1995, p. 110).

In March, 2019, member checks were initiated so that “the researcher solicits participants’ views of the credibility of the findings and interpretations” (Ely et al., 1991; Erlandson et. al., 1993; Glesne & Peshkin, 1992; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Merriam, 1988; Miles & Huberman, 1994, as cited in Creswell, 2013, p. 252). Preliminary interview data

were shared with the participants to gather feedback on whether or not the ideas captured the essence of their interviews. This took place after the transcriptions were available with the aim to acquire specific comments and to verify their experiences, or suggest ways to better communicate their perspectives. By conducting member checks, the quality of the data was improved and the validity shifted from the researcher to the participants by documenting their reaction to the data, clarifying ideas, and confirming the credibility of information (Miles et al., 2014, p. 58). Even though there were no requested revisions, any changes would not have been made without the explicit approval of the individual participant.

As Stake (1995) points out, there is always a “small invasion of personal privacy” when gathering data (p. 57). This invasion may occur in observations or interviews based on the behavior that is observed and the answers that are given. Researchers have to be aware of underlying bias, the types of questions they are asking, and the level of discomfort participants may feel. Ethics not only involve anticipating comfort levels and risk, but it also involves accurately presenting the words, thoughts, and actions of the people participating in the case study.

Reporting the Findings

Yin (2016) describes the aspects of filtering firsthand evidence and to consider certain methods to strengthen the recording of data. These practices also assist the researcher to initially decide how to best report the findings gained during the data-collection phase. These methods include: being a good listener; being inquisitive; being sensitive in managing others’ time, and the researchers, too; and distinguishing between firsthand, secondhand, and thirdhand evidence (pp. 158-159). In consideration of all

evidence collected, the findings include a descriptive account of the participants with quoted passages and paraphrased dialogues.

Data were used to summarize the themes in the form of word displays and narrative and descriptive writing. Through the coding process, these themes appeared as major findings that emerged through the data analysis process. Creswell (2014) advises qualitative researchers to utilize themes beyond their simple development and that “researchers can do much with themes to build additional layers of complex analysis” (p. 200). Finally, the data and research findings included in Chapter 4 of this dissertation project will be summarized and reported to the research site leadership, the participants of the study, and at other school meetings and educational conferences, as deemed appropriate by the researcher for the benefit of addressing the needs of middle school ELs.

Chapter 4

Summary of Findings

This qualitative case study was conducted for the purpose of uncovering a knowledge of inclusive practices (specific instructional practices and academic supports that teachers are providing to English Learners (ELs) in middle school general education classrooms) at a public school district in the Midwestern United States. Because considerable research points to higher academic failure of ELs as compared to their English-speaking peers, it is important to understand the dynamics of the educational process to make connections and/or recommendations for future practice in meeting their educational needs. The purpose of this descriptive case study was to examine the implementation of inclusive practices as part of the LIEP for ELs in middle schools at a selected Midwestern metropolitan public school district.

As reference for the reader, the Midwestern metropolitan school district and middle schools that participated in the research included: Abbott Public Schools (APS); Shuman Middle School (SMS); Mayer Middle School (MMS); and Paine Middle School (PMS). The school district and school names are identified by pseudonym only to protect the confidentiality of all involved in the study.

As part of the data collection procedures for this study, interviews were held during a four-month period following a specific protocol, and all participants were asked a common set of questions (Appendix F). The “information rich” participants who were chosen included three middle school principals, four middle school instructional coaches, four middle school EL specialists, and nine middle school core-subject-area educators who teach English Language Arts (ELA), mathematics, science, or social studies to sixth-

seventh- and eighth-grade students. The educators who participated from the sites have a wide range of professional education backgrounds and credentials, teaching and/or administrative experiences, and years of tenure.

Though not an intentional part of the study design, each participant who was interviewed was not brand new to teaching (no first-year teachers chose to participate). Three participants were in the first year of their current position. However, they had prior teaching experience in other positions in the school district, or teaching experience in other districts in Nebraska or in other states. The diversity of the participants and their collective experiences allowed for a broad scope of information to be gleaned from the interview questions and discussions to assist in answering the primary and secondary research questions of the study.

Primary Research Question

How is a Midwestern public school district implementing inclusive practices as part of its Language Instruction Educational Program (LIEP) to address the needs of middle school ELs?

Secondary Research Questions

1. What is inclusion for ELs in the core academic subjects in the middle school (e.g., English language arts, mathematics, science, and social studies)?
2. What are the beliefs and attitudes of middle school educators and administrators about ELs and their inclusion in general education classrooms?
3. What strategies do general education teachers use to support and include ELs in middle school classrooms?
4. How are general education teachers in middle schools supported through

collaboration and professional learning to meet the needs of ELs?

5. How do educators and administrators perceive the implementation of inclusive practices for ELs in middle schools?

The interviews were open and honest, and participants were eager to give their input regarding the interview questions and the strengths and needs of educating middle school ELs. The questions allowed for some in-depth answers of knowledge and/or experiences in working with ELs, or perspectives on how well ELs were being served in general education classrooms or by EL specialists in pull-out or co-teaching settings. Overall, the interviews pointed to how to best educate ELs to ensure their academic success, and not to a lack of wanting and/or needing to educate them. All participants were asked the following questions:

1. What is your name and title?
 - a. If you teach, what subject area(s) do you teach? If more than one, please list your primary area first.
 - b. How long have you been in this position?
2. Tell me about your past and present teaching experiences, especially those experiences that relate to teaching ELs.
3. Describe the ELs you work with and what they bring to your school community. For example, describe the cultures represented, levels of prior education, native language, language backgrounds, assets and educational needs.
4. How would you describe the EL instructional models implemented in your school and who is responsible for this implementation?

5. Define inclusion for ELs in the core academic subject areas.
6. What are examples of inclusive practices to address the academic needs of ELs and what is the level of implementation of these practices in the core-subject-area classroom?
7. Describe evidence-based EL instructional strategies you (or your colleagues) use to support and include ELs in the core-subject-area classrooms.
8. How is a student's native language used in core-subject-area classrooms?
9. Describe your understanding of a dual-language model of instruction for ELs and any benefits or barriers.
10. What is the perception in your building of including ELs in core-subject-area classrooms?
11. Describe ways that you collaborate with colleagues to address the educational needs of ELs in the core-subject-area classroom.
12. How does collaboration, specifically in Professional Learning Communities, support the inclusion of ELs in the core-subject-area classroom?
13. What type of professional learning have you received to support the inclusion of ELs in your classroom?
14. Describe the benefits and the barriers of including EL students in core-subject-area classes.
15. What additional comments do you have concerning the inclusion of EL students in core-subject-area classes?

Theme Development

Several preliminary concepts began to emerge throughout each phase of the research study, which helped to generate and develop themes that are connected to the

purpose of the study and the proposed conceptual framework previously outlined by the researcher (Figure 2). When analyzing all of the data collected, four themes were identified and were in direct correlation to the purpose of the study, research questions, conceptual framework, review of literature, interviews, and PLC observations. These themes include the varying needs of ELs, instructional implications, professional development, and the collaboration among educators.

Similarities and differences among the three middle school sites and within individual interviews became apparent throughout the discussions and also during the observations of the PLC sessions at each campus. Even though document review was part of the initial design, no document was identified during the process that was directly relevant to the study, so they were excluded.

Throughout the data collection process (especially during the interviews), slight modifications of the researcher's conceptual framework became necessary. This modification addressed the attitudes and beliefs that educators have regarding ELs learning and succeeding, which initially was focused on the attitudes and beliefs of the inclusion and inclusive practices of ELs in general education classrooms. It is the belief of the researcher that if the following conditions are met, EL students will be successful at school and meet the same core academic standards as their English-speaking peers. These conditions include:

1. EL students are included in general core-subject-area classes.
2. Teachers have asset-based attitudes and beliefs that EL students can learn and succeed.
3. Specific integrated instructional supports in the area of language and core-subject-matter acquisition are provided to students.
4. Educators collaborate to identify specific areas of need for ELs.

Theme 1: Varying Needs of ELs

The varying needs of ELs proved to be a strong theme that developed early in the research study, and that was confirmed through the participant interviews. As described earlier in the report (Table 2: APS Student Demographic Percent Analysis), the school district has a diverse population of students with many who qualify for EL services (at some level) at their school. With the diversity of ELs in the district comes differing school experiences, varied exposure to the English language, individual competence in their own native language, and a wide range of English language proficiency levels. This has created challenges for teachers and administrators to meet individual student needs. This is especially magnified if educators are not fully knowledgeable or trained in the diverse needs of ELs. The instructional coach at PMS described it this way:

We often throw kids in the masses and expect them to learn. Some ELs come to us that have been in school since they were four or five, but that was in a different country. So all of them are coming in with different backgrounds, and they are not quite to grade-level standards yet. So the conversation we need to have is how can we meet them where they are? How can we support them with interventions so they are successful and reach grade-level standards?

All participants in the study articulated, in some way, that the ELs they serve are not all the same.

“The population is very diverse and they have very diverse needs,” (PMS ELA Teacher).

The MMS Principal stated that “they (ELs) come with differences. They have different needs in education and in social ways, too.”

Other responses highlighted the diversity in languages and home countries which can make teaching students even more challenging.

We have students from lots of different countries. Not only Spanish-speaking students, but some are from other countries like Sudan or Somalia, and even Russia. They are different, not in a bad way, I mean ... they are different in languages and schooling. How are we sure we are even meeting the needs of them? We try our best. I wish we had more interpreters to help them understand, like Arabic. (SMS Math Teacher 2)

They want an education, but it is very hard. They want to graduate and may be the first one in their family to do it. I am not sure they all really know about life after high school. (SMS Principal)

Even though the participants were not always able to describe all the differences, it created a deeper discussion surrounding the implications for planning and delivering instruction which they felt only marginally comfortable addressing. One participant openly stated:

All ELs seem to be different. Different home country, language and dialects, level of education of parents, educational experiences coming into this district, levels of English, exposure to school rules and structures, and exposure to grade-level content. They are expected to learn English very quickly, have commitments to family, and maybe didn't ask to come to the U.S. (SMS Science Teacher)

Teaching culturally and linguistically diverse students requires teachers and administrators to know and understand how students acquire a new language and where they are on the English proficiency continuum. A majority of the participants showed different levels of understanding of ELs' academic needs. One participant admitted that she treats them like every other student but knows they learn differently.

"That is on me. I feel like I am really not meeting their needs in the classroom and I'm not sure how to find out. I am really embarrassed to say that" (PMS ELA Teacher).

The EL specialists who participated in the study showed a much different understanding of the varying needs of ELs. This was attributed to the fact that all four have earned endorsements in ESL as part of their certification to teach. Additionally, all

have been specifically teaching ELs for a number of years, or they have been assigned to a school with a fairly high number of EL students. The ESL endorsement allowed for their conversation to be richer in their knowledge of EL instructional strategies, and in knowing the process students go through in acquiring the English language.

The EL specialists also showed much more comfort in the focus group interviews and were fairly well versed and prepared to answer the interview questions with more detail. In the focus group setting, there were statements such as “you have to know the levels of your ELs” and “they are not like native-English speakers.” One EL specialist noted:

EL students have many assets that they bring to the school and to other kids who are from the U.S., but they have a language barrier. That would be really their only deficit when trying to learn content at our school. Especially when they have to take the state tests. They aren’t low in cognition, they are low in English.
(MMS EL specialist)

Other statements during the EL specialist focus group conversation indicated a similar knowledge about their students and how to serve them.

I’m pretty confident that our ELs are making good gains. What I see in my (pull-out) classroom is amazing. They love to learn and are like sponges. I do lots of things to help them, some are lower in English and some are higher. But they all are learning. I tell my grade-level team they are growing. Sometimes they can’t see it, though, like I see it. Maybe they just don’t know. (SMS EL specialist)

There also seemed to be a level of misunderstanding about EL students in general. Some participants know the students have varied needs but have not been exposed to diverse situations in either their personal or professional lives. Especially if teachers were fairly new to APS (or when they were first hired into the district), there seemed to be a “culture shock” of their own. This was voiced by several participants during the

interviews, with general education teachers being more vocal about these differences.

My eyes have really been opened up here (at APS). I didn't grow up with any other kids just learning the English, and I now realize the needs these kids have, both in academics and socially, and it has to be really hard for them. (PMS ELA Teacher)

We had several students (ELs) that came to my regular ed(ucation) classroom back in the early days when we first started getting language learners in the regular ed classroom. They had no background in English, and had been in the country a very short time. As a teaching staff, we didn't really know what the best way to teach them was. (SMS instructional coach)

Back in the early days of me in the district, we did the best we can. We didn't have a lot of ELs at that time. When they started coming to MMS, we were putting every kid in the same (EL) program, we only had one fit for those students, so with the help of the district, we began to develop different levels of English language instruction in programs. We feel much better about where we are now. (MMS Principal)

Along with understanding that ELs have varying needs, it is important to mention that the attitudes and perceptions of participants in having ELs in their schools and including ELs in general education classrooms were positive and accepting among all.

Overall, the admission that ELs have many different needs was prevalent in the interviews, but more importantly, they bring strength to their school community.

Statements such as "They're so fun, and each one has an interesting story." (MMS EL specialist 1) and "Kids are kids. They all come with some sort of different needs. We as adults are the ones to figure that out for them." (MMS Social Studies Teacher)

The PMS Principal summed up the sentiment by noting:

I think with the change happening so fast, the one thing I have noticed is our district's sensitivity in our students has gone way up because we're exposed to a lot more cultures and even poverty levels. At our school, bullying went down and their sensitivity went up. So I feel there is a lot of good they've brought. Our school and our district has embraced the change.

Theme 2: Instructional Implications

Once students enter middle school (grades six through eight), core-content subject matter has become increasingly abstract and complex. If ELs are trying to learn English in order to master content, academic vocabulary, and other higher-level concepts, these grade levels are crucial to their future success in high school and beyond. It has been determined that educators know the students come with varying needs and different levels of school experience. Instructional implications are critical to consider, but were many times unplanned or sporadic (as confirmed through the interviews).

Though there are specific EL programs available at each of the middle school sites and taught by EL specialists (e.g., newcomers, transition programs, pull-out classes, and some co-teaching), the majority of ELs are included in core-subject-area classes taught by general education certified teachers, most of whom do not have an ESL endorsement to help them differentiate instruction and assessment for ELs. Based on research and best practice, the instructional components must be designed for (and take into account) students with varying levels of English proficiency, their individual skills and abilities, and their level of content knowledge.

All EL specialists who participated in the study hold the ESL endorsement, while only three of the other teachers or principals interviewed hold the same endorsement. There was clearly a difference in the interview responses from EL specialists as compared with others who have little knowledge of learning and instructional strategies for ELs in core-subject-area classrooms. Other than the EL specialists (or any other teacher or administrator who held an ESL endorsement), there was a common admission from the participants that they were unsure of specific instructional strategies when

teaching ELs, and responses such as “I’m not sure that I know specific strategies,” were common.

When participants were asked the following interview questions, there was a level of misconception, hesitation, and struggle when articulating a response.

Interview Question No. 6: What are examples of inclusive practices to address the academic needs of ELs and what is the level of implementation of these practices in the core-subject-area classroom?

Interview Question No. 7: Describe evidence-based EL instructional strategies you (or your colleagues) use to support and include ELs in the core-subject-area classrooms.

Responses to these questions included:

Who do I go to ensure instruction is appropriate for my ELs? I hear the word scaffolding or modifications or adaptation of lessons, but what does that really mean? What do strategies really look like? I’m not 100 percent positive I know strategies for them. Maybe I’m just doing some and don’t know it. (PMS Math Teacher 1)

I haven’t been trained on any evidence-based strategies. Maybe you could help me out with that! Or I guess I should be relying on people in my building that know how to really teach ELLs (English language learners). I can’t believe I can’t think of anything specific. (MMS ELA Teacher)

Some participants unknowingly described examples of instructional strategies that “would be good for all kids,” like using manipulatives, or nonlinguistic representations such as graphic organizers, kinesthetic activities, mental pictures, or physical models. However, they agreed that these are effective strategies for all students, not just ELs.

“I use manipulatives and graphic organizers with all my kids, not just my ELs” (SMS Math Teacher 1).

“Science is such hands-on, and ELs like the hands-on learning. Models and experiments and labs are perfect strategies” (SMS Science Teacher).

EL specialists were stronger at describing specific instructional implications when ELs are trying to develop their language, while at the same time master academic content. This was confirmed during the focus group interview when each EL specialist stated that they have an ESL endorsement and have experienced other training opportunities in addressing both the academic and social needs of ELs from the district EL Department. All EL specialists had some level of training in Sheltered Instruction Observation Protocol (SIOP) and other strategies for teaching and supporting ELs in their learning. Strategies such as lesson learning targets, language targets, wait time, nonvisual representations, graphic organizers, sentence stems, videos (and other technology) and language matrices were touched upon.

I use content and language objectives in my teaching. My ELs have to know what they're learning and what type of language skill will be used to get them to meet the goal. I also use think-alouds and sentence stems so the English language doesn't overwhelm them. We do this in chunks. (MMS EL specialist 2)

I always model lessons and use lots of visuals. I show them examples all the time. They can't just hear it, they have to see it. We support their math class by using sequencing words and using organizers in their thinking and writing. (SMS EL specialist)

I co-teach with the science teacher. We work very well together, and I do my best to help my students and supporting them with difficult concepts or reading material. Science can be hard, with a lot of terminology. I also have my kids use their words. They have to talk about their learning, but I think that is where student-centered learning is really coming in. (MMS EL specialist 1)

It is also important to add the voice of one mathematics teacher who had a grasp on instructional strategies for ELs. She noted:

I would say things like the sentence starters, or like if we're taking notes over something, giving them slightly more dictated notes so they're filling in smaller

pieces of it, so then they have stuff that makes sense so they can go back and process it later. Also, working with other kids that sometimes is an EL student themselves, but they have a larger grasp of the language in general. So if I'm trying to explain something and it's not clicking, having that other student kind of help as a support and explain it in their language or whatever. (SMS Math Teacher 2)

Other comments were worth noting, such as “they (ELs) need access to the content and access to other native English speakers” (SMS Principal); and “The kids are all over the place in the prerequisite knowledge or background in content that they have little exposure to because they are learning those things along with learning a new language” (MMS instructional coach 2).

Three participants voiced that many teachers, although not intentionally, have “lower expectations” of ELs, not because they feel ELs cannot learn the material, but that the teachers inadvertently water down the curriculum, ask lower-level questions geared more toward the retrieval or comprehension level, and intervene or “save” the ELs too quickly during complex text analysis, or when ELs are trying to learn difficult subject matter. Even though teachers do not personally want to hurt a student in their learning process, it is apparent that low expectations are detrimental to the student's progress and success.

It was also found that the use of a student's native language can be a major benefit if used judiciously in an English-only school setting, when clarifying terms, directions and academic concepts. Since Spanish is the language that most ELs have command at APS, some participants mentioned the importance of pointing out cognates, or words that have a very similar origin as their English equivalent, and that they can be extremely beneficial in teaching. During the interviews, only the EL specialists stated that they hear

students use their native language in classrooms to assist ELs in their learning of content. More of the participants stated that students used their native language “somewhat,” but that it was used more in social settings such as the hallways, the cafeteria, or during other “non-academic” times throughout the day.

Even though Dual Language Education (DLE) is garnering noteworthy support and is backed by significant research demonstrating the cognitive advantages of bilingualism, only one teacher and two principal participants who were interviewed could define, or had any experience with, DLE.

Other participants could not define (or could only partially define) the DLE concept. Most responses were in question form back to the researcher/interviewer such as: “Do you mean where they do part of the instruction in a native language?” (SMS EL specialist); or “I don’t know a whole lot about the dual-language model, could you describe it? I’d have to learn more” (PMS ELA Teacher).

There were other misconceptions about DLE that became apparent in the interviews.

In (another state), I nannied these two boys who, they were in a French immersion school, so the majority of their instruction was in French, so they were learning French and then they had a specific English class. So they still worked on their English concepts and they were native English speakers, but they had the French instruction or whatnot. (SMS Math Teacher 1)

The core principle of dual-language programs includes components of holistic development of students in which teachers and students work together to meet, or exceed, the academic standards of ELA, mathematics, science and social studies at each grade level through the development of two languages (Thomas & Collier, 2012). One teacher

participant completed her student teaching in a school district that incorporated the model at its middle school noted:

I student taught in (another school district) where they had dual language. It wasn't like here where the kids are just trying to learn English. It was English speakers trying to learn Spanish, and Spanish speakers trying to learn English. They were both trying to learn another language, and so they could balance each other out. But I think it made them stronger. (MMS ELA Teacher)

In summary, several participants, including the principals, generally articulated that solid instructional strategies are critical to consider for ELs in their subject-area classrooms. However, not all participants could name evidence-based instructional strategies to use with ELs in their classrooms, and they clearly agreed that they needed more professional development in this area. Many participants could not describe specific instructional strategies, but they know they want to do the best they can in educating ELs and are “all in” in their desire to learn more. This general consensus was confirmed by this participant:

I love what ELs bring to our school, but it is really hard to know exactly what they need, I mean educationally. I was not raised in a diverse town, and I do have only a little bit of any EL training. When it comes to exactly what they need, I am not sure. I have to rely on what I read or learn from other teachers, and we all need more information. (SMS Math Teacher 1)

Theme 3: Professional Development

There was a strong consensus from all the participants that most educators lack in-depth knowledge and training in the area of teaching strategies to address gaps in ELs' learning. One participant stated “we don't know what we don't know” in regard to teaching and learning strategies to support ELs. Many of the participants admitted that they were “not specifically trained,” “had little training,” “had no training,” or that what was offered in their preservice preparation in education was either insufficient or not

applicable to their current role in education.

SMS Math Teacher 1 noted, “Unfortunately, I would say it’s been a very small amount, and what was received was a long time ago.” Another telling response revealed: “The last training I had was probably, gosh, I don’t know. I don’t even remember the last time we have had professional development on ELL strategies” (PMS Math Teacher 2).

An overarching concern quickly rose to the surface during the interviews as another general education teacher articulated the lack of professional development focused on teaching ELs.

I haven’t had any. Really, probably the only professional development I’ve had would be things I have found on my own. I don’t think I’ve ever ... I didn’t take any classes in college that addressed ELL students. I don’t think I’ve attended a training that specifically talked about, here’s strategies for ELL students. I mean, it’s been pieces, like you go and talk about vocabulary, here’s a piece that will help your ELL students, but nothing specific. (SMS Math Teacher 1)

An area that stood out in the interviews was the lack of professional development, especially when EL students are in general education classrooms with no specific EL support such pull-out classes.

I know, obviously we want kids to get to grade level, and so we can’t continue to keep them operating in classrooms that are working on things that are behind grade level, or they’re never going to get to grade level. I mean, there’s all sorts of kids that come to us with a lack of background, and so it allows us to really dive in and think about our instruction and to be more purposeful in our planning. But we need more training on how exactly to do this for ELs. (MMS Social Studies Teacher)

The participants who felt much more comfortable with their level of training and professional development were those educators who hold their ESL endorsement from a higher-education institution. All four EL specialists, but only two other participants interviewed, have an ESL endorsement. The four teacher participants who are assigned to specific positions as EL specialists are very knowledgeable in EL instructional strategies

and other supports needed for students acquiring English, and their academic needs in subject-area classrooms. Other teacher participants (and principals) voiced their appreciation and the value of these specialists, but they admitted that sometimes they do not rely on them or purposefully seek them out for their expertise.

Our EL specialists are awesome! They know so much about ELs and their learning needs, but I don't seek them out enough. I know they are busy, too, but I guess I should contact them more. Obviously, we work at the same building and with the same kids, and I need to rely on what they know. (SMS Math Teacher 2)

He (our EL specialist) is amazing. We are so glad to have him here, but he is really spread thin. There is only one of him and all of us (teachers). It is hard to have him help me with my own learning about ELs. He does a great job, but I underutilize him and sometimes I feel bad that I don't know more than I do. (PMS Math Teacher 1)

Participants from all three sites shared that there is some EL-specific training available, but is “spotty” and not necessarily embedded in their professional duties or considered to be ongoing learning. During the focus group interview with the instructional coaches, they mentioned the importance of embedded professional learning regarding effective instruction of ELs, but that it was not consistent in their buildings. They agreed that what is offered through the district has been very good, but it sometimes seems like a “one-shot deal,” with very little follow-up, and other participants shared the same concern.

The EL Department in our school district does a great job recognizing that we need more training when teaching our students English. There has been training in SIOP, and last summer we went to training with some presenter from Arizona. She mostly helped content teachers working with ELs in the classroom. It was good. She was good, but that was kind of a one-time thing. (MMS Math Teacher)

Because of the increase in demands for school administrators and teachers to understand issues related to second-language acquisition and specialized instruction for ELs, APS initiated SIOP professional learning approximately 10 years ago for EL

specialists and other staff members identified on a schoolwide basis. Based on the work of Echevarria, Vogt, and Short (2007), the SIOP training had previously been provided in the district by EL administrators in the central office. Sheltered instruction, or Specially Designed Academic Instruction in English (SDAIE), makes subject-area content comprehensible for ELs, while at the same time developing their English skills. However, because of other prioritized initiatives in the APS five-year strategic plan, and the knowledge that there are many other valid professional development resources for ELs, SIOP training for the APS staff has not been a specific focus.

The MMS Principal (who participated in SIOP training with his staff), stated, “What the district provided to us was great when it happened. You know, SIOP.”

He spoke in detail about the prior sheltered instruction training that had been offered in the school district, and specifically to his entire staff. He was able to articulate the importance of the training, but that it was no longer intentionally offered.

The SIOP training that you offered to our staff was awesome but that was like, what, five years ago? Most of my staff was there ... even in July. The things taught just for ELs was amazing, and I was seeing a lot of those strategies incorporated into their lessons. It was really good, but now I have so many new staff, so the training really should be done again. It was the one type of training that put all my teachers on the same level in understanding ELs. (MMS Principal)

As an answer to some of the professional development concern, the school district recently hired two EL Curriculum and Instruction Specialists (EL instructional coaches), who are responsible for working with the APS EL Department to implement and maintain a quality continuum of district EL services. There are two specialists (grades kindergarten through five, and six through 12) who have begun to provide job-embedded curriculum and instructional support that help teachers more effectively meet the academic achievement of ELs. This includes EL strategies, support and technical

expertise to classroom teachers and specialists, administrators, and other school personnel designed to improve instruction and assessment of ELs. The specialists spend a majority of their time in classrooms, observing the teaching and learning process of ELs and providing feedback, helping plan instruction, assisting with data analysis to drive instructional and building-level decisions, and providing professional development opportunities.

Several of the participants mentioned the secondary EL instructional coach and how helpful she can be to specifically support teachers in learning how to teach ELs.

I know she can help us with strategies in literacy and vocabulary development, and reading and writing instruction strategies specifically for ELs, but I guess we don't purposely reach out to her as much as we should. That's my fault. (PMS Principal)

Other participants admitted they did not know their EL instructional coach that well, or had very little contact.

The EL coach, sorry, I can't remember her name, has some really good ideas that she brought to our staff, and she's always very open to if we have a specific issue (with ELs). Then we can address that. I do know that I will touch base and make contact over specific students with our EL teachers here in the building, but that's harder considering the extent of language that we have with our ELs, and scheduling just doesn't always seem to match up. So it's kind of hard. (SMS Science Teacher)

The hiring of the two EL instructional coaches seems to be a very positive approach to assist APS in the professional development of teachers regarding ELs. However, only one coach is assigned to all middle schools and the high school in the district. Implications of her lack of consistent presence in individual buildings, or the possibility that more coaches should be hired based on the need, seems to be plausible.

As far as professional development surrounding inclusive practices and supports for ELs, the consensus of teachers and administrators through the interviews indicated

evidence that the district needs more. “Everyone can always use more professional learning about ELs, and I don’t know that any of us could hear enough about it” (PMS instructional coach).

Other important professional development topics were heard as part of the interviews, which include: meeting the specific needs of ELs who may have a suspected learning disability; Students with Limited and/or Interrupted Formal Education (SLIFE); equity and culturally responsive teaching; and methods to encourage families of ELs to be more involved in their child’s education.

Theme 4: Collaboration Efforts Among Educators

All the participants interviewed reiterated that collaboration plays an important role in effective teaching practice and to the academic success of EL students, and some collaboration efforts were noted. However, based on the analysis of the interview and PLC observations, noticeable barriers became evident for successful and effective collaboration.

During the past two years, APS has prioritized PLC collaborative efforts for educators to achieve better results for the students it serves. Even though the teachers interviewed knew collaboration is key to increased academic achievement for ELs, few could give examples of how they utilize their knowledge about the academic needs of EL students within their professional interactions with other staff. However, collaboration is not happening to an extent that is making a noticeable difference, or that it is consistent as part of their PLCs or other modes of collaboration. Most participants were honest (but not comfortable) with the fact that they were not having intentional conversations with other staff about addressing the needs of the ELs whom they teach. Two participants

verified this by saying, “I’m embarrassed that I don’t have many of these specific conversations” (SMS Science Teacher), or “I feel like now I am really letting my EL kids down, I’m not sure I feel like I can ask good questions about their learning. This interview has opened my eyes to my lack of knowledge” (PMS Math Teacher 2).

Because the school district has several priorities that are considered a “heavy lift” (standards-based lesson planning, PLCs, and using data to drive instructional decisions), some of the teachers interviewed felt collaboration may be taking a back seat to other priorities. There is intensive work happening at the district and school level as far as curriculum work to ensure a guaranteed and viable curriculum for all students. A lack of focus on collaboration was confirmed by the MMS ELA teacher, who said, “Right now, we are going through some shifts and some changes, and so when you don’t have a strong curriculum, it makes it really difficult to really talk about anything else.”

Another concern brought to the interview discussion was the fact that teachers have a lot on their plates.

I think because we ask them (general education teachers) to play multiple roles, we ask them to be classroom teachers, but we also ask them to be a specialist. They’re so limited in the amount of time that they have to actually do that PLC time, even though they have the same time during a week, to me a PLC is limited to when that time frame is during the day. And so, they may not coincide with all three grade levels. Sometimes it’s about that communication piece that’s happening through email to oversee some of the kids. (SMS Principal)

When the participants were discussing the best ways to collaborate, the nature of the school schedule, and the lack of time before, during and after school, were reasons given as barriers to, or inconsistencies in, effective collaborative efforts. It was noted that “the lack of time and the way our schedules are set up” (PMS EL specialist); and “We are

not consistent with that. I mean it happens (collaboration), I'm not going to say it never happens, but it's not consistent" (PMS Principal).

Many of the participants made reference to the secondary EL Curriculum and Instruction Coach (a new position as of January 2018) and other EL specialists assigned to their buildings.

We need their support, for sure" (PMS Math Teacher 2).

General education teachers feel the key for collaborative conversations surrounding the needs of ELs must include specialists. However, in discussing the individual schedules of the EL specialists and the six-through-12 EL instructional coach (and their other job responsibilities), it would be impossible for them to attend all middle school PLCs during the course of the day. An instructional coach stated:

When all three PLCs are happening at the same time at that grade level, you maybe see her (EL Curriculum and Instruction Coach) once a month. And so I don't know what to do to fix that, but I do know that we have much better conversations around the support that we give those kids. That communication can obviously happen more when they're invited to the table, and we can all be around and have a common conversation. If they're not there, typically it's not a conversation that is even happening. (MMS instructional coach 1)

Even though there are organized PLC meetings one time per week at each school, and other collaborative planning time is built into the teacher's day, minimal discussion is taking place about explicit instructional strategies or specific language development strategies for ELs. If students struggle (including ELs), they are typically lumped into common "struggling student" conversations in Response to Intervention (RTI) meetings (RTI is a multi-tiered, early support process for students struggling with learning or behaviors), or during other informal meetings trying to diagnose learning gaps.

"A lot of work happens in our RTI meetings" (MMS Principal).

A variety of “one size fits all” interventions may be suggested that has nothing to do with language acquisition or language development strategies. One participant admitted:

They’re lumped together. They’re lumped with special education when we plan, with the exception of, once a lesson is put into play, I will get emails from teachers saying, ‘I have a student in my classroom’ — sometimes EL, sometimes SPED — and saying, ‘I don’t know what to do for them. Would you please come down and watch them?’ So the overall planning for these students gets lumped together. (SMS instructional coach)

Discussion at PLC time regarding specific needs for ELs seems rare. The PMS Principal confirmed this as well noting that “Those conversations aren’t happening out there. It’s typically held only for RTI meetings when teachers ask ‘What else can we do?’”

Middle schools are organized in teams, which allows for the team of teachers to get to know their students on a much more personalized level. Individual student data are coming to the forefront to make instructional decisions, but they have recently been prioritized in the district as an expectation to meet the needs of students. The SMS instructional coach confirmed the hard work of the middle school staff by noting, “The pieces are coming together, they’re just disjointed.” Another participant noted:

As a district we are getting to the point where data-driven decisions are at the root of everything that we do, and people are getting closer to that and getting better at that, but I don’t know that we’re there literally as a whole. In order to get down to some of those root causes, like EL that maybe will come, but we’re not there yet. (SMS Principal)

Finally, no conversation about EL-specific learning needs or EL-specific instructional strategies was recorded in all 12 observations of middle school PLCs in which the researcher participated. The absence of evidence in these conversations confirmed the perspectives of all participants in the interviews. Additionally, of 12 PLC

observations, there was no representation of an EL specialist or secondary EL Curriculum and Instruction Coach at the PLC. The researcher did make an inquiry regarding the lack of specialist representation, and “it doesn’t work into their schedules” was the common response. The only EL-specific question that arose during one of the observations at PMS dealt with accommodations for ELs on the upcoming Nebraska Student-Centered Assessment System (NSCAS), in which the researcher (in her current role in the district) has partial responsibility in answering.

Seemingly, the overall theme of collaboration was surrounded by the lack of time and scheduling conflicts. It must be stated that there was not a lack of interest or desire on the part of any educator interviewed. Rather, it is more about the importance that collaboration happen and the need for assistance in how to make it work.

Tandem Study and Implications for Grades 6-12

This dissertation study was completed in tandem by another researcher colleague and doctoral candidate at the University of Nebraska focused on high school educators (grades nine through 12) in the same Midwestern metropolitan public school district. The initial design of both studies had several similar and purposeful research components including the purpose of the study, identified problem statement, primary and secondary research questions, and interview questions. The decision to conduct a common tandem dissertation allowed for the researchers to consider the potential impact at the entire secondary level (grades six through 12). The demographics at the school district under study was conducive to finding commonalities with the intention of strengthening the EL programming.

The potential impact is as follows:

1. To identify gaps or discontinuity that is required of public school educators in meeting each EL at their point of need through effective instructional expertise;
2. To identify themes that support EL's and their transition from middle school to high school; and
3. To inform the prospective alignment of school district EL services (grades six through 12) at the secondary level.

After the data analysis process was completed for each study, the researchers came together to discuss their findings and to identify commonalities in the data. Other considerations included identifying areas that could potentially assist ELs in transitioning from middle school to high school to aid in the continuity of programming and ease the transition into the high school. In review of the data presented, the researchers identified three common themes which included:

1. Addressing the needs of the English Learner;
2. Focusing on the needs of general education teachers; and
3. Identifying the role of the EL specialist.

The key considerations focused on understanding the struggle of ELs and creating a transition plan from EL-specific support courses to general education as well as the transition from middle school to high school. It was also discovered that it would be important to create school district guidance to support the inclusion of ELs in general education classrooms and an intentional plan for professionally developing teachers and principals. Further, the EL specialist role can be broadened by clarifying their role in the school and ensuring that they can be present at PLC meetings to discuss individual ELs

and their needs. Table 5 highlights the similarities between middle and high school and several key points for school personnel to begin discussion with identifying EL program and staff support needs.

Table 5

Implications for the Inclusion of ELs in Grades 6-12

Themes for Alignment of 6-12 EL Programming	Middle School Needs	High School Needs	Points for Discussion and Consideration in EL Service Design
Addressing the Needs of the English Learner <i>Understanding the struggles of English Learners and creating a transition plan</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Diverse characteristics and attributes of students * Social Needs * Meeting grade level standards * Students with Limited and/or Interrupted Formal Education * Language proficiency levels * Supporting the transition to general education classes 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Language proficiency level expectations * Limited and interrupted formal education * Educational background and content knowledge * Pacing and course sequence * Student Strengths * Strategies to support ELs (low prep by content area) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Is the academic struggle due to limited language proficiency levels, a lack of content knowledge and experiences, or some combination of both? * Create a transition plan <ul style="list-style-type: none"> * EL-inclusion to general education classrooms or courses * Transition from 8th grade to 9th grade
Focusing on the Needs of General Education Teachers <i>School district guidance to support inclusion of ELs in general education classrooms and plan</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Teacher efficacy * Lack of knowledge/training * Cultural competence * Stages of Language Learning * Explicit EL instructional strategies * Job embedded and ongoing * Compliance * Curriculum * Program Design * Equitable Access 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Share Newcomers curriculum * Written process and data used to support placement in core courses * Professional Development Needs: * Culture and First Language * Language Acquisition (levels and characteristics); 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Create school district guidance to support inclusion of ELs in general education classrooms * Outline EL professional development opportunities for teachers and administrators <ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Know the levels of language acquisition and the stages of second language acquisition * Understand the background of ELs (content knowledge, language proficiency) * Learn specific EL instructional strategies * Support the transition from LIEP to general education

<i>for professional development</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Collaboration time * Data analysis 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * EL instructional strategies by content area 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Research, plan, professionally develop, and implement Dual Language Education (DLE) programming for ELs (emergent bi/multilingual students) * Research, plan, professionally develop, and implement translanguaging pedagogy in all instructional settings
<p>Identifying the Role of EL Specialists</p> <p><i>Utilizing the EL Specialists expertise and ensuring an EL presence in Professional Learning Communities(PLCs)</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Define EL specialist role * Articulating role to whole staff * Position in PLCs * Consultant * Schedule implications * Available staff * Time * Variety of collaborative methods 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * List of EL staff assigned to the content area * A bank of ready to use EL strategies and supports * PLC Roles and guiding questions to address the needs of ELs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Utilize the EL specialists' expertise to assist all staff * Help to create a transition plan * Coaching and consultation * Professional development * EL Presence at Professional Learning Communities (PLC) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Identify and EL specialist to attend grade level (or subject level) PLCs and strategies to support their role at PLCs * Alternate methods to be at the PLC table when schedule does not allow for them to attend * Identify a teacher on the PLC to contact EL specialist * Use of EL instructional coach (6-12) * Use of online digitals as a method of communication * Teachers collaborate before or after school

Finally, since this research was carried out in tandem at the middle and high school levels, it has the potential to further define inclusion for ELs and provide clarity regarding implementation of inclusive practice strategies provided by general education teachers. The study can also impact future professional learning needs for educators and administrators in teaching ELs, establish criteria to ensure ELs' needs are being addressed through inclusive supports in general-content-area classrooms, and identify a set of common guidelines for the implementation of inclusion for ELs at the middle and high school levels.

Chapter 5

Discussion and Recommendations

A rapid increase in students identified as English Learners in U.S. schools has called for intentional action on the part of school districts to address students' needs and to take full responsibility for their academic achievement. As outlined in the literature review, several major pieces of legislation and how they impact ELs help guide schools in addressing the educational needs of the learners. Every student acquiring the English language has a unique and varied background, as well as comprehensive, social and academic needs to be considered when expected to master the subject-area curriculum like their native English-speaking peers. As the number of ELs increases in schools, and continued comparisons of their academic achievement indicate discrepancies, the need to adequately serve them becomes significant (August, Estrada and Boyle, 2012).

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative descriptive case study was to examine the implementation of inclusive practices as part of the Language Instruction Educational Program (LIEP) for ELs in middle schools at a selected Midwestern metropolitan public school district. The study was conducted in order to uncover a knowledge of inclusive practices (specific instructional practices and academic supports that teachers are providing to ELs in middle school general education classrooms). Successful and intentional integration of ELs into the general education population, and how general education teachers support them, lies at the core of the study.

This study was important because it highlighted the current realities of middle school teachers and administrators who serve ELs at their schools, which has been an

ongoing national discussion in the field of education. Many previous research studies have been conducted regarding the needs of ELs and methods to support their academic achievement in a kindergarten-through-12th-grade setting, but fewer studies address their transition to the general education classroom or the supports that teachers provide. This study focused solely on the middle school level in an attempt to understand inclusive practice implementation for supporting the academic achievement of middle school ELs in general education classrooms. Telling the current story from the practitioners' perspective was the focus of the research.

This chapter includes an interpretation of the major findings from the data collected as they relate to the literature review, and a discussion to help answer the research questions that were proposed for the study. The concluding components of this chapter include recommendations for future practice for teachers and building administrators in the middle school, recommendations for further research, and a brief conclusion.

The study explored the input and perspectives of middle school teachers, specialists, and principals and how they understand and use specific inclusive practices and academic supports provided to ELs in middle school general education classrooms in order to answer the primary and secondary research questions of the study:

Primary Research Question

How is a Midwestern public school district implementing inclusive practices as part of its Language Instruction Educational Program (LIEP) to address the needs of middle school ELs?

Secondary Research Questions

1. What is inclusion for ELs in the core-subject areas in the middle school (e.g., English language arts, mathematics, science, and social studies)?
2. What are the beliefs and attitudes of middle school educators and administrators about ELs and their inclusion in general education classrooms?
3. What strategies do general education teachers use to support and include ELs in middle school classrooms?
4. How are general education teachers in middle schools supported through collaboration and professional learning to meet the needs of ELs?
5. How do educators and administrators perceive the implementation of inclusive practices for ELs in middle schools?

Discussion of the Findings

This research was carried out because educators have a moral, legal, and professional responsibility to guarantee that EL students can participate meaningfully and equally in educational programs and other opportunities at school. When examining a real-world case, teachers, specialists, and school administrators can “reflect on their own beliefs and practices and engage in frank conversations about how we can work and learn from one another better in the service of ELs” (Castellon, Cheuk, Greene, Mercado-Garcia, Santos, Skarin, & Zerkel, 2015, p. 5). There are components of the study that can potentially help to describe the complexity of inclusive practices in middle school general education classrooms which may assist educators when developing or revising their current instructional programs for ELs.

When analyzing the data collected, four themes were identified and were in direct

correlation to the purpose of the study, research questions, conceptual framework, and the literature review. These themes include the varying needs of ELs, instructional implications, professional development, and collaboration opportunities among educators.

The Needs of ELs

All of the participants articulated (in some way) that ELs come to them with varying needs, both socially and academically, and that they are responsible as educators to help them to be successful. No two ELs are the same, and with this diversity comes differing experiences. ELs come from many different geographic locations, have varied school experiences, competencies in their native language, levels of exposure to the English language, and other social and emotional factors that affect their language acquisition and content learning. Fox (2009) confirms these wide variances in ELs, along with differences in socioeconomic factors, family circumstances, and that the ELs' academic, language, and social and emotional needs vary, making it difficult to learn.

Through the study, it became apparent that teachers and administrators welcome ELs into their schools and classrooms, hold positive attitudes toward them, and that the students benefit from being included in general education classrooms. The educators interviewed realize the students have varied needs but have not necessarily been exposed themselves to diverse situations in either their personal or professional lives, which creates some difficulty in understanding ELs' needs. The concern was not the inclusion of ELs in general education classrooms, rather that teachers may feel unprepared to teach and interact with the students, implying a level of interference with their academic achievement. However, this finding does not distance the teachers from a desire to learn

how to best understand and work with the EL student. Though educators cannot always describe EL characteristics and their attributes, this has opened up the possibility for deeper discussion, professional learning, and research opportunities regarding the implications for planning and delivering high-quality lessons to the students.

As educators are seeing an increase in ELs entering their schools and included in general education classrooms, an urgency to support students in their language acquisition and content knowledge so they can be successful in school becomes paramount. Educators must analyze the varied needs of ELs and commit to designing the best learning environments. They also must thoroughly consider the philosophical and theoretical views of second-language acquisition experts and other best practice methods of supports tailored to the specific needs of ELs. Many believe that supporting students in their acquisition of another language (or languages) can create particularly marketable individuals as they transition into college and careers in today's highly globalized world. However, Ruiz (2010) argues that should not be the purpose. Minority languages have “instrumental purpose” and that we must understand that language-as-resource (LAR) sees the “intrinsic value of multilingualism rather than a narrower reference to economic value” (as cited in Catalano & Hamann, 2016). Ruiz (2010) further notes that economics and careers in globalized trade should not “define the entire effort of multilingualism” (Delavan, Valdez, & Freire, 2017, p. 97).

Instructional Implications for ELs

To develop the best instructional programs for ELs, educators should consider students' diverse and varied backgrounds, experiences, levels of proficiency in the language (or languages) being learned, and their understanding of academic core content-

subject-matter. ELs require intentional teaching and learning strategies, and when they are included in the general education classroom, teachers must examine their personal methods of instruction and act appropriately on those methods. If ELs are simply placed in general education classrooms with no other considerations or specialized supports, they fare the worst on academic indicators and outcomes (Thomas & Collier, 1997).

Middle school academic subject matter proves to be extremely abstract and complex for an EL, which only continues to become more difficult as the ELs move through grade levels and into high school. The participants interviewed in the study agree that ELs need “something different” regarding instruction, but they were not well-versed in what that “something” might entail. Teaching all students (ELs and non-ELs) using similar instructional supports may be good for most, but when considering how ELs acquire language and best learn academic content, teachers need to implement explicit strategies and methods to meet ELs’ needs (Echevarria, Vogt, & Short, 2013).

The research presented in the literature review aligns with the findings of this study as more ELs enter general education classrooms and teachers are expected to have them progress academically. Various inclusive practice supports for ELs (e.g., components of sheltered instruction, content and language objectives, language matrices, sentence stems, oral language use, and an explicit focus on vocabulary) are known and provided by English as a Second Language (ESL)-endorsed specialists but are not as evident with the general-content-area teachers or principals. Several participants mentioned their past professional development in sheltered instruction (based on the research and resources of Echevarria, Vogt, & Short, 2007) that was provided by the district, but there has been little opportunity for further learning or follow-up training.

Translanguaging methods can also be considered as inclusive practice supports, but have not been part of current instructional practices at the study sites. However, by utilizing the student's entire repertoire of language, teachers would be able to focus on student comprehension and understanding of content regardless of the language that is expressed, while fully supporting the overall achievement and learning of the student. "For teachers who do not speak the language of their students, this work [translanguaging] is not unattainable, but can be facilitated with a combination of creative solutions (such as asking the students to write or audio-record their responses) and the assistance of colleagues, parents, and community member who speak the language of the students" (Ascenzi-Moreno, 2018, p. 367). Technology assistance (e.g. Google Translate) can also assist teachers in capitalizing on the languages of the students to help them access curricular content.

Krashen and Terrell (1983) discuss the five stages of language acquisition and the time it takes for ELs to perform on par with their English-speaking peers. This knowledge, along with explicit instructional strategies, is key for all educators (not just ESL-credentialed teachers) to incorporate into the initial design and adaptations of their lesson planning and instructional delivery.

This study implied that students who are served in specific LIEPs (e.g. newcomer, pull-out, or co-teaching), taught by an EL specialist, receive EL-specific instructional supports as the norm. However, as the students' transition into general education subject-area classrooms, specialized instructional strategies, for the most part, cease to exist. Finally, despite the best intentions of all participants in the study, the placement of ELs in the general education classroom raises concerns about how they are being taught. In the

absence of EL-specific strategies and targeted language instruction, ELs' needs are not fully being met. Effective teaching for language-diverse students comes from a deep understanding of various perspectives on teaching, learning, and the ability to accommodate student needs in all classroom settings.

Professional Development

Diverse academic needs of ELs, and the fact that effective instructional strategies must be implemented during instruction, led the study to the importance of high-quality professional development for all educators. This study highlighted the lack of continuous training and job-embedded supports for general education teachers and administrators in the schools focused specifically on ELs. Honigsfeld and Dove (2010) underscore that collective expertise of teachers is harnessed through collaborative practices among educators and a whole-school approach to meet the needs of ELs. This shared responsibility or collective approach cannot take place if the staff is insufficiently trained and developed on how best to work with the learners.

Consensus was evident as the participants shared their input during the interviews and agreed that most educators in their buildings lack in-depth knowledge and training in the specific characteristics of an EL, as well as teaching strategies that address gaps in their learning. When speaking with the research participants, preservice preparation was defined as "little to none" unless the teacher continued their education or had added an ESL endorsement to their teaching credentials. Specifically, teachers mentioned multicultural understanding courses as a requirement for their undergraduate degree, but those courses did not teach them about, or how to implement, evidence-based instructional strategies geared toward ELs.

The school district studied has a significant population of ELs, and it does provide some professional development opportunities to staff, but they are not necessarily embedded in their professional duties or considered ongoing, long-term, or sustainable. However, the participants referenced the EL specialists assigned to their buildings and the EL instructional coach who was recently hired to provide on-site curriculum and instructional support to help teachers more effectively meet the academic needs of ELs. Other professional learning opportunities in the district are offered to teachers who work with culturally and linguistically diverse students, but are optional for teachers to attend.

The findings of the study indicate the importance of the expertise EL specialists and other teachers who hold an ESL endorsement, or of those who have experience and specialized training working with ELs. Clearly identifying the role of the EL specialist and articulating their position to the entire staff is a critical component to a school that serves ELs, and the specialists' knowledge should be accessed and utilized by all school staff. The EL specialist can share their expertise in the form of coaching or consultation with other educators in areas such as advocating for ELs; educating teachers in effective instructional techniques used with ELs; assisting in the alignment of language proficiency standards within content curriculum; cultural competency; ensuring compliance and adequate program design; and helping to ensure ELs have equitable access to all programs, opportunities, and resources in the school.

General education teachers who have ELs in their core-subject-area courses are asked to meet the needs of every student they teach. Along with all other staff in the building, they must foster meaningful relationships with students, differentiate instruction, and incorporate explicit language development processes into their lessons.

Teachers who are willing to teach ELs and be properly prepared and supported will better ensure equitable educational opportunities for ELs and their future success.

Educator Collaboration

Even though there is increased recognition of the diverse needs and instructional implications of teaching ELs, general education teachers can sometimes feel isolated or unprepared when attempting to meet the academic and social needs of ELs who are assigned to their courses or classrooms. This study has determined that the participants (with the exception of the EL specialists) are not fully confident in their knowledge of, and methods of teaching EL students, yet they display the desire to learn. Dr. Jim Cummins states that all teachers must gain access to theoretical understandings and instructional strategies that promote academic achievement for ELs, which cannot be accomplished in isolation (as cited in Coleman & Goldenberg, 2009). Further, the conceptual framework developed for this study, based on the work of Fenner (2014), stresses the importance of collaboration among educators and the shared responsibility of all educators in a school to help identify and solve problems in the areas of need for ELs so they can be successful in school.

Ongoing access and understanding of student information and the best practice in the instruction for ELs must be shared among professionals and is not the sole responsibility of those teachers who hold specialized credentials in ESL. This includes access to important information collected at the point of entry into a school system that can assist teachers and school leaders in knowing the students and their families (i.e., home country, length of time in the U.S., language(s) spoken, education background, and other pertinent information that will assist a school in meeting the individual needs of

students). School systems can then devise methods to collaboratively share this information with those educators that see and work with the students on a day-to-day basis. This allows school personnel to utilize and build on an ELs individual strengths, while at the same time be sensitive to their specific needs.

Throughout the study, the educators agreed that, at times, collaboration is not the top priority when it comes to discussion about the learning needs of the ELs they serve. This has occurred because of the many things teachers are asked to do, and the limited time available to collaborate, even when knowing that collaboration is important. It is crucial to know if there are teachers in a school (or district) with experience teaching ELs who can offer sage advice and support. Additional local supports include other school districts with EL populations in the state; local colleges or universities; educational service units; or state education departments.

The sharing of information can come in a variety of forms, from organized Professional Learning Communities (PLCs), grade-level meetings, middle school team meetings, electronically shared documents, and before- or after-school meetings. PLCs, for example, create the opportunity for professionals to analyze various types of assessment data and make instrumental decisions and adjustments to meet the individual learning needs of all students. This can be a powerful process when identifying the academic gaps for any student, including ELs.

The researcher observed PLC sessions as part of this study to gain an understanding of general collaborative efforts and conversation about the ELs they serve. Even though all the participants interviewed knew that collaboration is key to increased academic achievement for ELs, collaborative conversations, specifically about their ELs

and their progress, was not taking place. This was due to their level of understanding of EL-specific pedagogy, and a general “lack of time.” This brings the study back to the importance of professionally developing teachers around all topics on ELs. Specifically, if teachers are developed in the characteristics of ELs, culturally responsive teaching, appropriate instructional programming, and academic supports, it will address the notion that all ELs can succeed as learners and achieve the same performance outcomes expected of all students.

Recommendations for Future Practice

This study offers several recommendations for future practice for teachers, principals, and other school district officials who create educational program plans for individuals or groups of ELs. Research has determined that a shared responsibility of all educational professionals in a school or district is recommended as best practice to meet their needs (Fenner, 2014). Teachers, administrators, and other staff should not work in isolation when creating these programs, as all have a wide variety of expertise, level of training, and bring valuable input to the table. The following recommendations outlined below are for teachers, principals, and districts for consideration.

Teacher Needs

1. It is recommended that all teachers, whether they are in the role of an EL specialist, instructional coach, or general education core-subject-area, understand specific characteristics and the learning needs of ELs. This includes the stages of second-language acquisition, the time it takes for ELs to acquire English to the level of academic proficiency compared with their native English-speaking peers, and other variables that affect their social and

academic learning. Since this knowledge is highly researched, schools are recommended to make this a priority based on the number of ELs they are serving and incorporate that knowledge into the initial design and adaptations of their instructional strategies (Cummins, 2000; Echevarria et al., 2013; Krashen & Terrell, 1983; Thomas & Collier, 1997).

2. Teachers need to be provided with high-quality and ongoing professional development opportunities on various topics regarding ELs and their diverse needs. These can include second-language acquisition; making subject matter comprehensible to ELs; reading, writing, speaking, and listening strategies; scaffolding new knowledge; and the social and cultural needs of ELs. A wide variety of evidence-based instructional strategies and teaching methods are available for schools to receive through several different avenues. This can be provided through state education departments; educational service units; online modules; third-party expert consultants; workshops; conferences; and many other professional development books and resources.
3. It is recommended that teachers collaborate with other professionals in their school building and/or the school district about the learning needs of ELs, and they must be provided the time to collaborate in order for it to occur. PLCs are a good example of a formalized process in which teachers can discuss the academic needs of ELs based on an analysis of data collected from annual language assessments, formative and summative assessments, content standard mastery, classroom observations, and other demographic data. Formal PLCs may not be a district initiative or priority, but there are other

methods to collaborate, including grade level meetings, subject-area meetings, electronic communication, conference calls, or meetings held before or after school hours.

Principal Needs

1. As the instructional leader of a school, principals are in the position to build a welcoming and inclusive culture and climate for all students and families they serve. It is imperative that ELs feel part of the school and are supported through equitable access to the core curriculum and all other enrichment and extracurricular activities that are offered to all students. It is recommended that principals hold staff to this expectation and be a constant advocate for the students. This can be accomplished by supporting culturally responsive professional development on a consistent basis that includes all teachers and support staff. Principals can ensure ELs are not physically isolated, but instead are a welcomed and integrated part of the school. Further, ELs and their needs should be a constant part of the development of a school's vision, mission, and continuous improvement goal planning.
2. School principals have extensive work in the area of instructional leadership that must be balanced with day-to-day managerial tasks for the smooth and effective operation of a school. As busy as school leaders are, they must know the needs of their students, staff and families. School administrators must also be educated about EL program administration and the legal obligations in serving the students. Based on research, it is recommended that principals be helped with clear guidance from school district personnel in order to educate

them with the legal aspects, as well as methods to coach teachers in meeting the needs of ELs. This support provided to principals can ensure compliance, instructional continuity, and educator collaboration to address the specific needs of their ELs.

3. School leadership supports for ELs and their teachers are recommended through the protection of time in the schedule for collaborative data analysis conversations on behalf of all students. Principals can also find ways to ensure an EL specialist (or other staff member knowledgeable about EL instructional pedagogy) attends the collaborative meetings. Through this method, principals can also participate or observe to ensure teachers are addressing individual EL-specific needs.
4. School leaders are in a strong position to advocate for programs such as dual language education or translanguaging practices on behalf of their students. It is recommended that principals reach out to district level administration (or superintendent) to open the conversation of how a minority languages can be used as a resource when educating ELs and the considerations of integrating these practices in their school goals as part of equity and access for all students.

Program Needs

1. Based on this study, it is recommended that teachers, principals, and school district personnel collaborate and create specific guidance or transition plans for EL students transitioning from specialized LIEPs (i.e., newcomer, pull-out and co-teaching) to full inclusion in general education content classrooms.

This transition plan should encompass an evidence-based, collective, and team-based approach to determine the specific learning needs of each EL in their transition process. This plan has the potential to ensure a smooth progression from the specialized EL support program to the least restrictive environment for continuity and accessibility of core instruction.

2. It is recommended that the school district research the potential of “course for credit” opportunities for teachers and administrators to advance their knowledge through EL-specific courses with higher education institution partnerships. This could serve several purposes including; increased pedagogical knowledge of teachers and administrators working with ELs, pay scale advancement for staff, and/or the opportunity for teachers and/or administrators to earn their ESL endorsements through a higher education institutions.

Recommendations for Further Research

Although this study focused solely on the middle school level, the relationships in the findings through the tandem study with the high school perspective helps the researchers to understand the implications of inclusive practices in grades six through 12.

Future research might include:

1. Knowing that ELs enter school at either the pre-kindergarten or kindergarten level, including the pre-kindergarten-through-5 or kindergarten-through-5 grade levels, to a research study would be important. This would create a comprehensive pre-kindergarten-through-12 understanding in order to make systemic decisions at a school or school district while also potentially assist

the students during major transition years (typically from fifth to sixth grade and eighth to ninth grade, depending on the school or school district grade configurations). At any point of grade-level transition, a pre-kindergarten-through-12 study would allow for a comprehensive analysis of EL programming and help ensure better continuity of that programming.

2. This study focused on only core-subject-area teachers (English language arts, mathematics, science, and social studies) but did include the perspectives of EL specialists, building principals, and school instructional coaches. Because EL students also attend other exploratory courses throughout their school day (e.g., art, physical education, music, band, media skills, and computer technology), a recommendation for further study would be to include those teachers into the conversation of how they are supporting ELs through their instruction and inclusive practice supports.
3. The study was conducted at a Midwestern metropolitan school district composed of approximately 10,000 students, with 16 percent of the students qualifying for EL program services. Many school districts that have significantly lower numbers of ELs have questions surrounding their legal and programmatic responsibilities in serving the students. Replicating this study in a rural setting or a school district with a low-incidence of ELs would help them to understand the current level of practice and potential changes in their procedures and services to EL students.
4. It would be valuable to conduct this study focused solely on the transition school years (typically fifth to sixth grade, eighth to ninth grade, and 12th

grade to postsecondary school). With the knowledge and understanding of inclusive practice implementation that is provided by general education teachers, or a transition plan for students from EL services to a full general education setting, it may help ease the overall transition and create a more successful academic journey throughout the education career of ELs.

5. An additional area that is recommended for further research is to consider the diversity of the students (e.g., race and ethnicity, gender, native language, country of origin, student with limited and/or interrupted education, or refugee) and how inclusive practices are meeting their individual needs in classrooms and schools.

Conclusion

The implementation of inclusive practices to support middle school EL students in general education classrooms takes an intentional commitment and understanding of how ELs learn, and the supports that are most effective in assisting them with language and subject-area content acquisition. All participants in the study agree that the inclusion of ELs in general education classes is the key to their academic success. They fully support ELs inclusion in classrooms, and have a desire to share responsibility among all staff for their learning. There was also common agreement among the participants that EL students need individualized and explicit instructional supports, especially when planning lessons and delivering instruction. As seen through the research, there can be significant barriers to fully meet this need.

Except for the EL specialists (who have certification to work with ELs), all participants felt a level of ignorance and disconnect in their specific knowledge of how to

best educate ELs, especially since the students are all vastly different in their backgrounds, experiences, language proficiency levels, and exposure to formal education. This disconnect was because of their own lack of experience in working with ELs; the absence of EL-specific instructional supports; a dearth of specific and ongoing professional development; and the scarcity of professional collaboration time to discuss student needs. Nonetheless, all participants agreed that to improve the education of ELs in core-subject classes, they all would need to improve their knowledge, understanding, commitment, and other elements of working with ELs to the best of their abilities. It is proposed through this study that if all these conditions are addressed and implemented to a high degree, EL students will be successful at school and meet the same academic standards as their English-speaking peers. This will require a focused and professional commitment from all educators to create an actionable plan specific to the needs of the school or school district.

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Appendix A

Research Project Description

Addressing the Needs of Middle School English Learners Through Inclusion in General Education Classrooms: A Descriptive Case Study of a Midwestern Metropolitan Public School District

Kris Schneider

UNL Doctoral Candidate • Educational Administration

Middle School Focus

Please Contact: mschneider@gips.org



The University of Nebraska-Lincoln

Purpose Statement: The purpose of this descriptive case study is to examine the implementation of inclusive practices as part of the Language Instruction Education Program for English Learners (ELs) in middle schools at a selected midwestern metropolitan public school district. At this stage of the research, inclusive practices for ELs can generally be defined as specific instructional practices and academic supports in the core subject areas for ELs to succeed as learners and achieve the same performance outcomes expected of all students.

Tandem Research: This dissertation study is being completed in tandem by two researchers, one focused on middle schools and one at a high school in a midwestern metropolitan public school district. The potential impact of this type of study is to identify themes that support the English Learners' transition from middle school to high school and the prospective alignment of school district EL services.

Study Significance

- Demographic Shifts in Public Schools
- Legislation and Policy
- Educational Equity
- Inclusive Practices for English Learners

Literature Review

- Beliefs and attitudes of educators about ELs and their inclusion in the core subject area general education classrooms
- Evidence-based EL instructional strategies
- Collaboration among educators to meet the needs of ELs

Primary Research Question:

How is a midwestern public school district implementing inclusive practices as part of their Language Instruction Education Program to address the needs of middle school English Learners?

Secondary Research Questions:

- What is inclusion for English Learners in the core subject areas in middle schools (i.e., English language arts, mathematics, science, and social studies)?
- What are the beliefs and attitudes of middle school educators and administrators about English Learners and their inclusion in general education classrooms?
- What strategies do middle school educators use to support and include English Learners in classrooms?
- How are middle school educators supported through collaboration and professional learning to meet the needs of English Learners?
- How do middle school educators and administrators perceive the implementation of inclusive practices for English Learners in the middle school?

Research Methodology

- Qualitative Research Design
- Descriptive Case Study

Data and Data Collection

- Semi-structured Interviews
- Observations of professional learning communities (PLC)
- Document Review

Data Analysis and Verification

- Triangulation
- Member Checks
- Clarifying Researcher Bias

Appendix B

Dissertation Recruitment Email

E-mail recruitment invitation to participate in the research [for middle school principals]

Dear [Principal A, B, C],

Hello! As a current doctoral student at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, I am carrying out a research project titled; *Addressing the Needs of Middle School English Learners Through Inclusion in General Education Classrooms: A Descriptive Case Study of a Midwestern Metropolitan Public School District*.

I am sending this e-mail to you as a request to conduct research at your school for my qualitative dissertation study at UNL. I have district-level approval from _____, Associate Superintendent to complete this study (see attached approval letter).

As part of the research at your campus, I would be conducting one-on-one interviews, focus groups, and several observations of selected Professional Learning Community (PLC) meetings, each lasting approximately 60 minutes to increase my understanding of the implementation of inclusive practices as part of the Language Instruction Educational Program (LIEP) for English Learners (ELs) in content courses. Inclusive practices for ELs can generally be defined as specific instructional practices and academic supports in the core academic subject areas for ELs to succeed as learners and achieve the same performance outcomes expected of all students.

As the middle school lead principal, I would first need your permission to complete the study within your building during the 2018-2019 school year. I would then request the following:

- Permission to interview one administrator from your building [either you or an assistant - your choice] in a focus group setting with other middle school principals;
- Permission to place a participant recruitment flyer in your staff workroom;
- Permission to put out an all-call e-mail request to 6th through 8th grade core academic subject teachers (English Language Arts mathematics, science, and social studies) to potentially participate in an interview in a one-on-one setting after contract hours;
- Permission to recruit and interview your EL specialist(s) and your instructional coaches after contract hours;
- Permission to observe identified PLCs twice during the school year as part of the study.

There is no compensation for participating in this study, however, your input will be a valuable addition to my research and could potentially identify themes that benefit the English Learners' alignment of school district EL services and their transition from middle school to high school. All information, interviews, and study data will be strictly confidential. No campus name or personnel from your school will be identifiable at any point of the research.

Thank you in advance for your response, and for your consideration. Please contact me for further detail and clarification of questions.

My Best,
Kris Schneider

Appendix C

Research Study Recruitment Flyer



SEEKING VOLUNTEERS FOR A RESEARCH STUDY!

IRB Approval #: 20180918663EX

*Addressing the Needs of Middle School English Learners
Through Inclusion in General Education Classrooms*

I am seeking educator participants to be part of a research study to find out about English Learners at the middle school level. The purpose of this research study is to examine the implementation of inclusive practices as part of the Language Instruction Education Program for English Learners (ELs) in middle schools.

To participate in this research, you must:

- Be a middle school Principal or Assistant Principal
- Be a middle school core subject teacher (ELA, math, science, social studies)
- Be a middle school English Learner (EL) specialist
- Be a middle school Instructional Coach

Participation in this study involves:

- A one-on-one scheduled interview lasting approximately 60 minutes with core subject teachers (ELA, math, science, social studies)
- One focus group interview lasting approximately 60 minutes with English Learner Specialists
- One focus group interview lasting approximately 60 minutes with Instructional Coaches
- One focus group interview lasting approximately 60 minutes with middle school principals
- Agree to have the researcher observe your Professional Learning Community (PLC) meeting at least two times before December 20, 2018
- There are no risks involved in this research study

**To find out more information about this study and participate in the project, please contact
Principal Researcher: Kris Schneider at: XXX-XXX-XXXX**

**All inquiries will be treated privately and confidentially
There is no monetary compensation for this research**

Appendix D

Participant Informed Consent



IRB #: 20180918663EX

Participant Study Title:

Addressing the Needs of Middle School English Learners Through Inclusion in General Education Classrooms.

Formal Study Title:

Addressing the Needs of Middle School English Learners Through Inclusion in General Education Classrooms: A Descriptive Case Study of a Midwestern Metropolitan Public School District.

Authorized Study Personnel:

Principal Investigator: Kris Schneider, M.A. Ed. Office: (XXX) XXX-XXXX
Secondary Investigator: Dr. Kent Mann, Ed.D. Office: (402) 472-3459

Key Information:

If you agree to participate in this study, the project will involve:

- Public school educators (Middle School principals and certified staff)
- Procedures will include
 - One in-person or focus group interview
 - Observed two times during a Professional Learning Community (PLC) meeting
- The entire interview process will take approximately ninety minutes
- There are no risks associated with this study
- There is no compensation for this study
- You will be provided a copy of this consent form

Invitation:

You are invited to take part in this research study. The information in this form is meant to help you decide whether or not to participate. If you have any questions, please ask.

Why are you being asked to be in this research study?

You are being asked to be in this study because you work with English Learners in a middle school setting. You must be 19 years of age or older to participate.

What is the reason for doing this research study?

The purpose of this descriptive case study is to examine the implementation of inclusive practices as part of the Language Instruction Educational Program (LIEP) for English Learners (ELs) in middle schools at a selected Midwestern metropolitan public school district. As a middle school educator, you have professional insight on how ELs in your school are being educated and the instructional services that are being provided to them.

What will be done during this research study?

You will be asked to participate in one in-person interview or a focus group interview. The interview process will take approximately 90 minutes. You will also be observed during two Professional Learning Community (PLC) meetings or in the core academic subject classroom. You may be asked to share documents aligned to the study (e.g., classroom schedules, campus teaching and learning expectations, district program service documents), if applicable.

What are the possible risks of being in this research study?

There are no known risks to you from being in this research study.

What are the possible benefits to you?

The information gathered from this study will be used to potentially add to the insight of middle school EL education and help support instructional practices for ELs to succeed as learners and achieve the same performance outcomes expected of all students. However, you may not get any benefit from being in this research study.

What are the possible benefits to other people?

The benefits of the research is to potentially add to existing literature regarding the education of ELs specifically aimed at all middle school educators who work with ELs including; subject area teachers, specialists, instructional coaches, principals, and other staff which ultimately could affect the education of EL students themselves.

What will participating in this research study cost you?

There is no cost to you to be in this research study.

What should you do if you have a problem during this research study?

Your welfare is the major concern of every member of the research team. If you have a problem as a direct result of being in this study, you should immediately contact one of the people listed at the beginning of this consent form.

How will information about you be protected?

Reasonable steps will be taken to protect your privacy and the confidentiality of your study data.

The data will be stored in a locked cabinet in the principal investigator's office or electronically through a password-protected computer laptop. Recorded interviews will be transcribed by a professional transcription company (Rev) and your name will not be used during the interview process to protect your identity. The data will only be seen by the researcher during the study and for kept for one month after the study is complete.

The only persons who will have access to your research records are the study personnel, the Institutional Review Board (IRB), and any other person, agency, or sponsor as required by law. The information from this study may be published in scientific journals or presented at scientific meetings but the data will be reported as group or summarized data and your identity will be kept strictly confidential.

What are your rights as a research subject?

You may ask any questions concerning this research and have those questions answered before agreeing to participate in or during the study. For study related questions, please contact the investigator(s) listed at the beginning of this form. For questions concerning your rights or complaints about the research contact the Institutional Review Board (IRB):

- Phone: (402) 472-6965
- Email: irb@unl.edu

What will happen if you decide not to be in this research study or decide to stop participating once you start?

You can decide not to be in this research study, or you can stop being in this research study ("withdraw") at any time before, during, or after the research begins for any reason. Deciding not to be in this research study or deciding to withdraw will not affect your relationship with the investigator or with the University of Nebraska-Lincoln. You will not lose any benefits to which you are entitled.

Documentation of informed consent

You are voluntarily making a decision whether or not to be in this research study. Signing this form means that (1) you have read and understood this consent form, (2) you have had the consent form explained to you, (3) you have had your questions answered and (4) you have decided to be in the research study. You will be given a copy of this consent form to keep.

Participant Feedback Survey

The University of Nebraska-Lincoln wants to know about your research experience. This 14 question, multiple-choice survey is anonymous. This survey should be completed

after your participation in this research. Please complete this optional online survey at:
<http://bit.ly/UNLresearchfeedback>.

Participant Name:

(Name of Participant: Please print)

Participant Signature:

Signature of Research Participant

Date

Investigator certification:

My signature certifies that all elements of informed consent described on this consent form have been explained fully to the subject. In my judgment, the participant possesses the capacity to give informed consent to participate in this research and is voluntarily and knowingly giving informed consent to participate.

Signature of Person Obtaining Consent

Date

Appendix E

Participant Interview Protocol

Interview Protocol:

Investigator will review and collect informed consent

Interview Protocol: Middle School English Learners and Inclusion
<i>Addressing the Needs of Middle School English Learners Through Inclusion in General Education Classrooms: A Descriptive Case Study of a Midwestern Metropolitan Public School District</i>
Institution: Interviewer: Interviewee: (Name/Title/Position): Time of Interview: Date: Location:
Introduction: <p>The purpose of this descriptive case study is to examine the implementation of inclusive practices as part of the Language Instruction Educational Program (LIEP) for English Learners (ELs) in middle schools at a selected midwestern metropolitan public school district. At this stage of the research, inclusive practices for ELs can generally be defined as specific instructional practices and academic supports in the core academic subjects for ELs to succeed as learners and achieve the same performance outcomes expected of all students. Middle schools are defined as sixth through eighth grade. The high school includes ninth through twelfth grade.</p> Primary Research Question: <p>How is a Midwestern public school district implementing inclusive practices as part of their Language Instruction Educational Program (LIEP) to address the needs of middle school English Learners?</p> Secondary Research Questions: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What is inclusion for English Learners in the core academic subjects in the middle school (i.e., English language arts, mathematics, science, and social studies)? • What are the beliefs and attitudes of middle school educators and administrators about English Learners and their inclusion in mainstream classrooms? • What strategies do mainstream teachers use to support and include English Learners in middle school classrooms? • How are mainstream teachers in the middle school supported through collaboration and professional learning to meet the needs of English Learners? • How do educators and administrators perceive the implementation of inclusive practices for English Learners in the middle school?

This dissertation study is being completed in tandem by two researchers, one focused on middle schools and one at the high school level in a Midwestern metropolitan public school district. The potential impact of this type of study is to identify themes that support the English Learners' transition from middle school to high school and the prospective alignment of school district EL services.

Script:

"Good morning/afternoon. My name is Kris Schneider. Thank you for your time today. I am conducting research as part of my dissertation study at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln. The main focus of today's interview today is to get your perspective of the implementation of inclusive practices as part of the Language Instruction Education Program for your English Learners. I consider *you* the expert at your work so there are no right or wrong answers. I want you to feel comfortable with saying what you really think and how you really feel about all questions being asked. If at any time you are reluctant to continue the interview, please let me know and we will stop. The interview will take approximately one hour."

Consent Form Directions:

"Before we get started, please take a few minutes to read through the statement of consent because before you are interviewed, I must have your approval in writing (ask the interviewee if they need any part of the consent form clarified and collect the signed consent form before moving forward)."

Audio Recorded Responses:

"If it is okay with you, I will be audio recording our conversation. Recording research interviews is a great way to capture the information and ensures descriptive validity. By recording the interview, I am better able to carry on an attentive conversation with you and assure you that all your comments will remain strictly confidential. I will be compiling a report which will contain all of your comments without any reference to who you are. Please keep in mind that at any time during the interview, you may ask that I stop the audio recorder (if the interviewee agrees, turn on the audio recorder)."

"Do you have any questions before we begin?"

Interview Questions:

1. What is your name and title?
 - a. If you teach, what subject area(s) do you teach? If more than one, please list your primary area first.
 - b. How long have you been in this position?

2. Tell me about your past and present teaching experiences, especially those experiences that relate to teaching ELs.
3. Describe the ELs you work with and what they bring to your school community. For example, describe the cultures represented, levels of prior education, native language, language backgrounds, assets and educational needs.
4. How would you describe the EL instructional models implemented in your school and who is responsible for this implementation?
5. Define inclusion for ELs in the core academic subject areas.
6. What are examples of inclusive practices to address the academic needs of ELs and what is the level of implementation of these practices in the core-subject-area classroom?
7. Describe evidence-based EL instructional strategies you (or your colleagues) use to support and include ELs in the core-subject-area classrooms.
8. How is a student's native language used in core-subject-area classrooms?
9. Describe your understanding of a dual-language model of instruction for ELs and any benefits or barriers.
10. What is the perception in your building of including ELs in core-subject-area classrooms?
11. Describe ways that you collaborate with colleagues to address the educational needs of ELs in the core-subject-area classroom.
12. How does collaboration, specifically in Professional Learning Communities, support the inclusion of ELs in the core-subject-area classroom?

13. What type of professional learning have you received to support the inclusion of ELs in your classroom?
14. Describe the benefits and the barriers of including EL students in core-subject-area classes.
15. What additional comments do you have concerning the inclusion of EL students in core-subject-area classes?

Closure:

Thank you, reminder of confidentiality of responses, possibility for future interview or member checks, and plans for sharing the results.

Appendix F

Professional Learning Community (PLC) Observation Protocol

Professional Learning Community (PLC) Observation Protocol:

Addressing the Needs of Middle School English Learners Through Inclusion in General Education Classrooms: A Descriptive Case Study of a Midwestern Metropolitan Public School District

Primary Research Question:

How is a Midwestern public school district implementing inclusive practices as part of their Language Instruction Educational Program (LIEP) to address the needs of middle school English Learners?

Secondary Research Questions:

- What is inclusion for English Learners in the core academic subjects in the middle school (i.e., English language arts, mathematics, science, and social studies)?
- What are the beliefs and attitudes of middle school educators and administrators about English Learners and their inclusion in mainstream classrooms?
- What strategies do mainstream teachers use to support and include English Learners in middle school classrooms?
- How are mainstream teachers in the middle school supported through collaboration and professional learning to meet the needs of English Learners?
- How do educators and administrators perceive the implementation of inclusive practices for English Learners in the middle school?

Date:

Start Time:

End Time:

Observer:

Institution:

Professional Learning Community (Grade/Subject Level):

Description of PLC Participants	Description of the Setting
Total Number of Participants: Male: Female: Ethnicity: Job Titles:	

Description	Reflection
<p>Addressing the Needs of ELs: <i>challenges, academic content knowledge, English proficiency</i></p> <p>Beliefs and Attitudes about Inclusion of ELs: <i>assets vs. deficit thinking</i></p> <p>Inclusive Practices and Evidence-based Instructional Strategies for ELs: <i>approaches to language learning instruction; building background in core content; instructional strategies; assessment; supports</i></p> <p>Types of Collaboration: <i>planning, co-teaching, coaching, professional development</i></p>	

Appendix G

Professional Learning Community (PLC) Pre-Observation Script

Script to be Read Before the Professional Learning Community (PLC) Meeting
Observation (read to all PLC members present at the meeting):

Good Morning/Good Afternoon:

My name is Kris Schneider and I am here today as an observer of your Professional Learning Community (PLC) meeting as part of an approved research study. The study has been approved by the Associate Superintendent, your building principal as well as the University of Nebraska. I am only an observer of your meeting today and will be collecting written notes focused on your professional collaborative conversations. As part of the initial design of the study, ethical considerations are always at the forefront of my research. All statements, quotes, and information discussed in the meeting will be held strictly confidential and will not be personally identifiable in any way. Thank you, and please continue with your meeting.